うぶめのなつ

姑獲鳥の夏

4

原作 京極夏彦 Natsuhiko Kyogoku
作画 志水アキ Aki Shimizu

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姑獲鳥の夏 4

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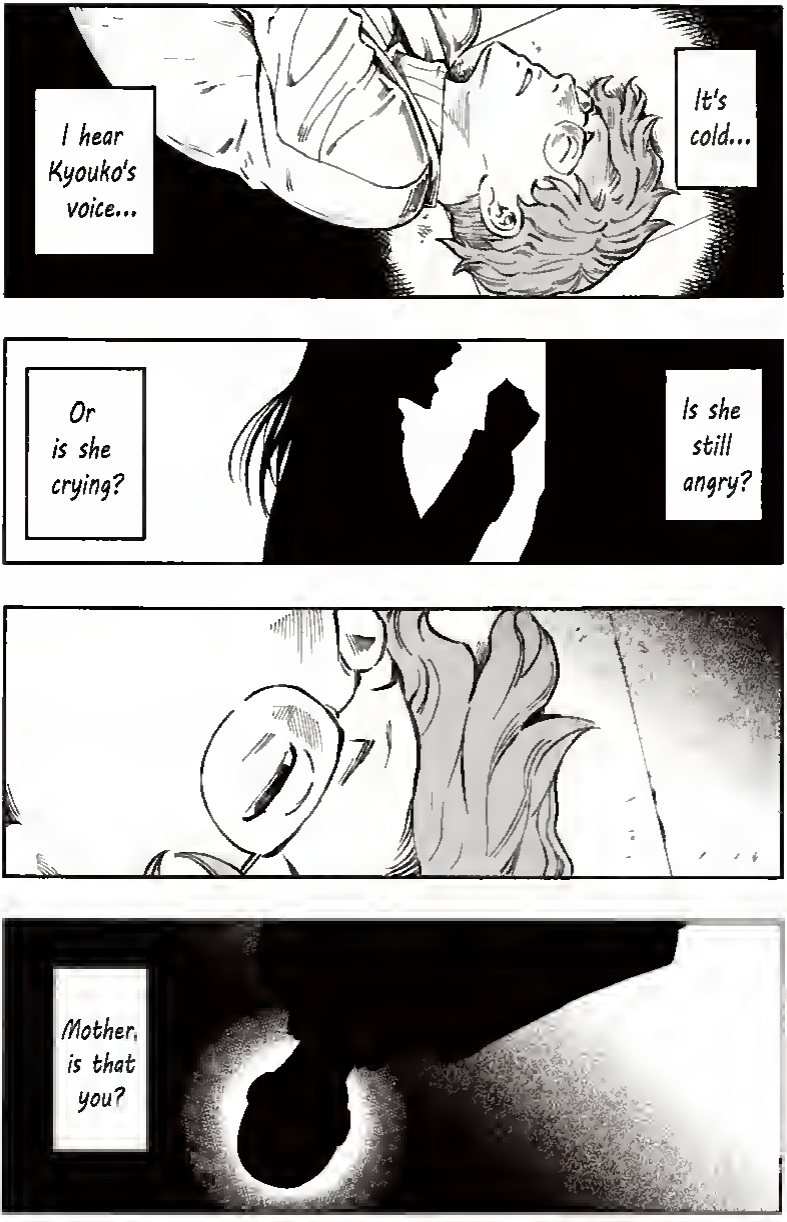
The Summer of the Ubume

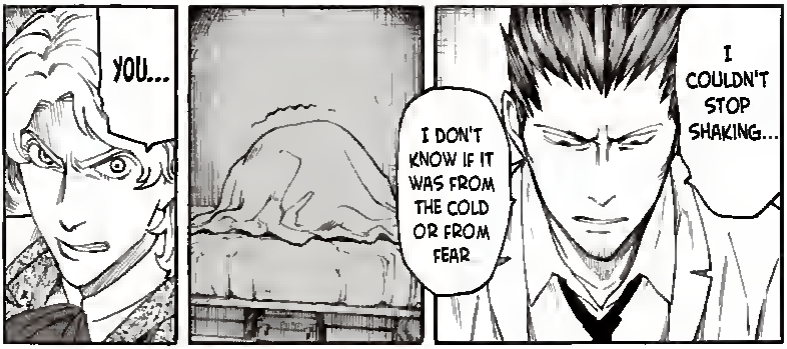
KYOUGOKU NATSUHIKO
&
SHIMIZU AKI

しきがない
shikigami
translation & typesetting by sang

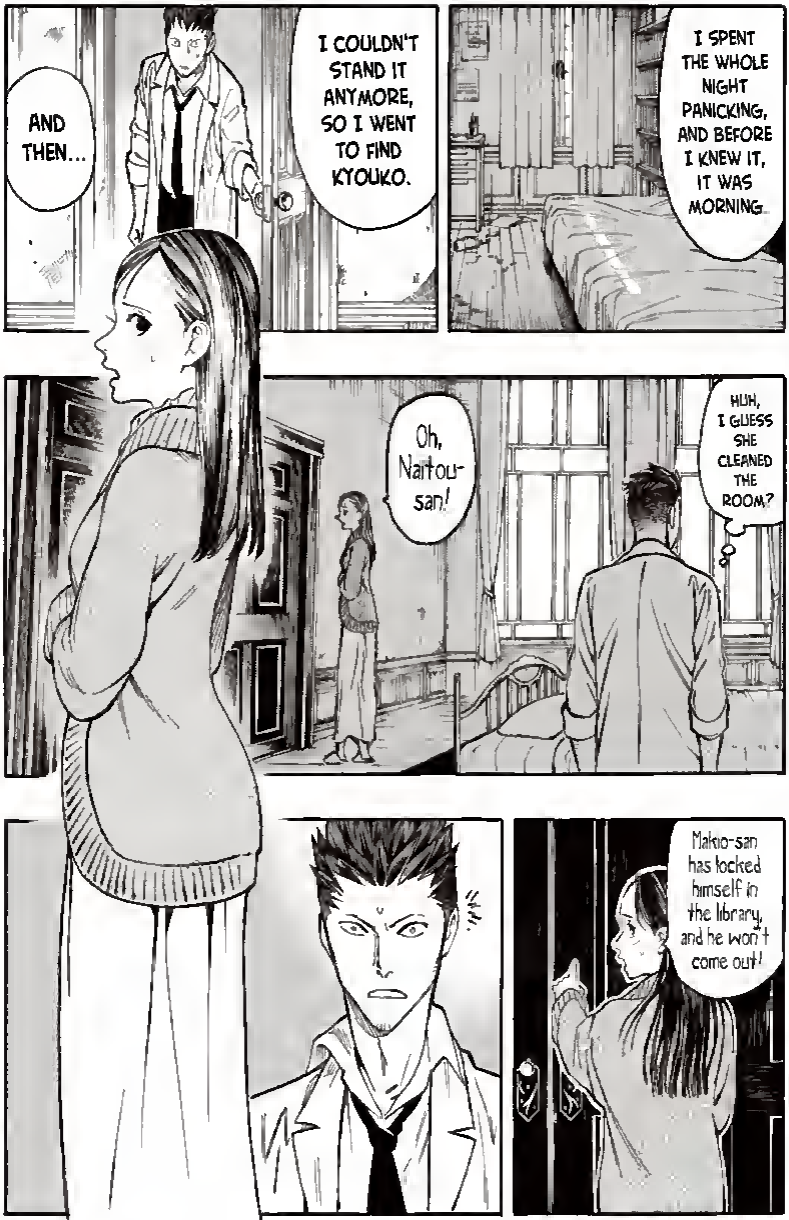
CHAPTER 8
Where am I?
Why am I here?


I hear Kyouko's voice...
It's cold...
Or is she crying?
Is she still angry?
Mother, is that you?

SO I GRABBED MY CLOTHES AND RAN BACK TO MY ROOM.
KYOUKO LET OUT AN AWFUL SOUND, AND THEN... SHE JUST STOOD THERE IN FRONT OF THE DOOR NOT MOVING AT ALL.

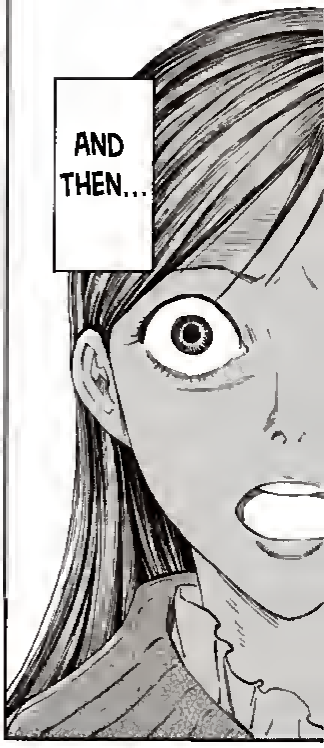

YOU...
I DON'T KNOW IF IT WAS FROM THE COLD OR FROM FEAR
I COULDN'T STOP SHAKING...

I WAS SCARED, OKAY!?
YOU COULD HAVE SAVED FUJIMAKI'S LIFE, BUT INSTEAD YOU JUST RAN AWAY!?
YOU'RE PATHETIC!
YOU CALL YOURSELF A DOCTOR!?


AND THEN...
I COULDN'T STAND IT ANYMORE, SO I WENT TO FIND KYOUKO.
I SPENT THE WHOLE NIGHT PANICKING, AND BEFORE I KNEW IT, IT WAS MORNING.
Oh, Naitou-san!
HUH, I GUESS SHE CLEANED THE ROOM?
Makio-san has locked himself in the library, and he won't come out!

WHOA, DID SHE FORGET WHAT HAPPENED LAST NIGHT?
What should I do?
I can't open the door...
AND NOW HE WAS EITHER DEAD OR DYING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT DOOR
EVERYBODY WOULD THINK IT WAS A SUICIDE, RIGHT?
IT WAS MY LUCKY DAY!
MAKIO WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO KNEW ABOUT US
AND NOT JUST THAT... IT WAS LIKE SHE'D FORGOTTEN ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIP, TOO.
RIGHT.
BUT THE DIRECTOR WOULDN'T COME, RIGHT?
BUT I NEEDED SOMEBODY ELSE TO WITNESS THAT THE DOOR WAS REALLY LOCKED FROM THE INSIDE, SO I TOLD KYOUKO TO GO GET HER FATHER.
ALL OF MY PROBLEMS WOULD BE SOLVED IF HE WERE GONE...
I FIGURED THAT MAKIO HAD TO BE DEAD BY THEN
TOMIKO SHOWED UP SOMETIME AFTER NOON AND STARTED MAKING A FUSS, SO HER HUSBAND CAME AND BROKE OPEN THE DOOR.

Makio -san isn't here!


AND THEN...

HE REALLY WAS GONE...

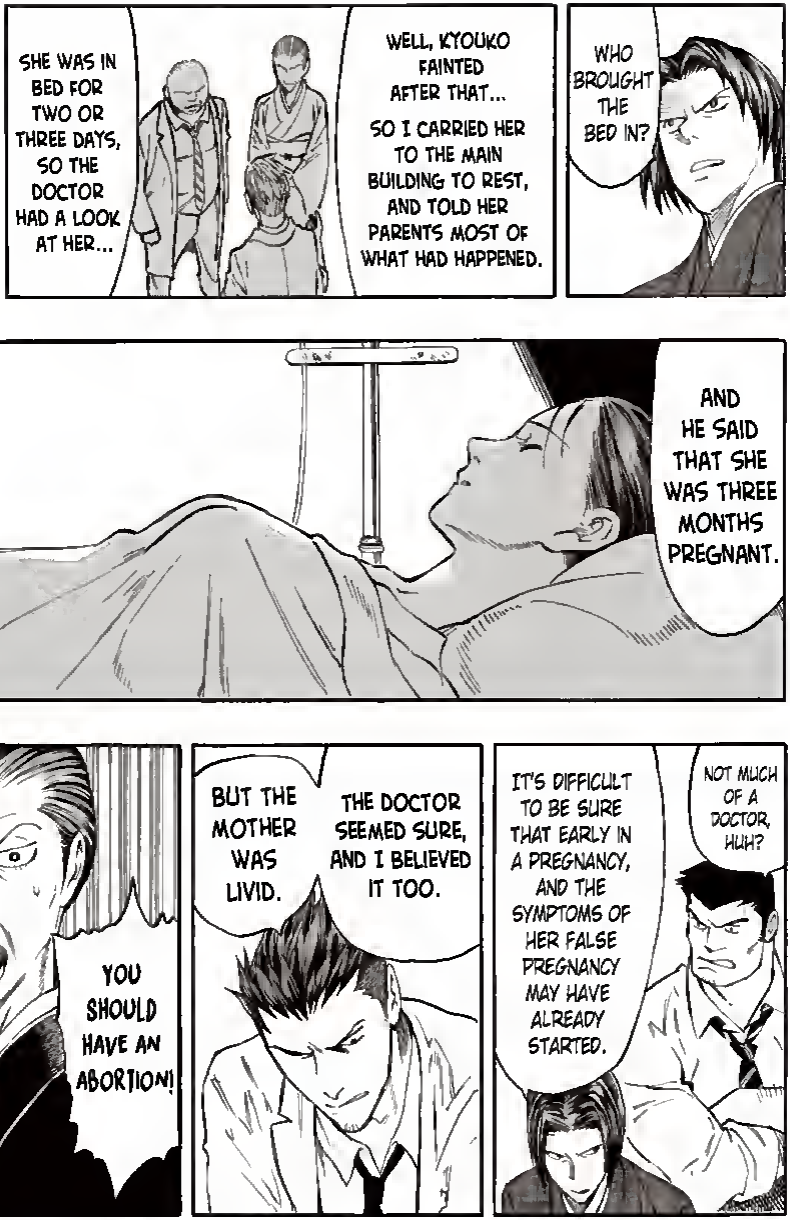
HE'S NOT THERE!? WHAT THE.

!!

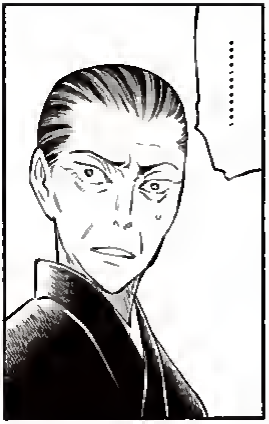
I WAS AFRAID HE'D...
I THOUGHT HE MUST HAVE GOTTEN OUT AND RUN OFF SOMEWHERE...
I WAS AFRAID HE'D SNITCH ON ME AND KYOUKO.
I KNEW HE WAS THERE... BUT WHEN KYOUKO SAID HE WAS GONE, I COULDN'T SEE HIM EITHER.
IT'S LIKE HE JUST WASN'T THERE.
BUT... HE'S DEAD.
HE'S REALLY DEAD.
I KNEW HE'D COME FOR ME.
AFTER THAT, I COULDN'T SLEEP, AND I COULD BARELY EAT...
YOU FEARED HIS REVENGE.
NAITOU-KUN...
HA HA HA HA HA !!!
AFTER ALL THAT...
HA HA HA!

SHOCK
.....
WHO REPAIRED THE DOOR AND BROUGHT THE BED INTO THAT ROOM?
OH RIGHT... KYOUKO WAS BAWLING ON AND ON ABOUT MAKIO....
SO I CALLED FOR HER PARENTS...
WHAT'S WRONG, KYOUKO-SAN?
BUT...
IT WAS RYOUKO WHO SHOWED UP.

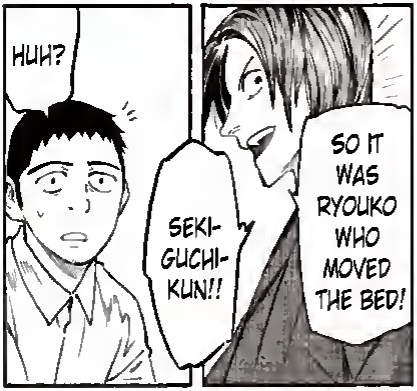
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'VE DONE...
BUT YOU SHOULD ASK FOR FORGIVENESS.
.....
TOSHIZOU, FIX THIS DOOR IMMEDIATELY.
BUT MISS RYOUKO, WE REALLY SHOULD CALL A CARPENTER..
YOU BROKE THE DOOR, SO YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIX IT, RIGHT?
I DON'T WANT ANYONE ELSE TO GO INTO THAT ROOM.
.....
I'M SURE THAT TOKIZOU SAW THE CORPSE.

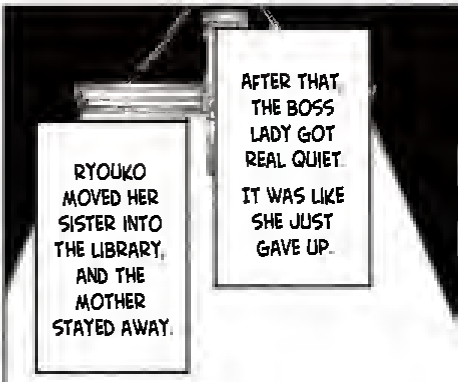

SHE WAS IN BED FOR TWO OR THREE DAYS, SO THE DOCTOR HAD A LOOK AT HER...
WELL, KYOUKO FAINTED AFTER THAT...
SO I CARRIED HER TO THE MAIN BUILDING TO REST, AND TOLD HER PARENTS MOST OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED.
WHO BROUGHT THE BED IN?
AND HE SAID THAT SHE WAS THREE MONTHS PREGNANT.
YOU SHOULD HAVE AN ABORTION!
BUT THE MOTHER WAS LIVID.
THE DOCTOR SEEMED SURE, AND I BELIEVED IT TOO.
IT'S DIFFICULT TO BE SURE THAT EARLY IN A PREGNANCY, AND THE SYMPTOMS OF HER FALSE PREGNANCY MAY HAVE ALREADY STARTED.
NOT MUCH OF A DOCTOR, HUH?

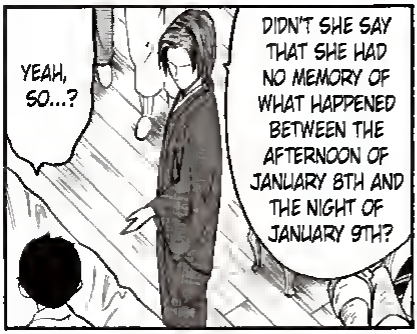
No!! I'm going to have Makio-san's baby!!
I ORDER YOU TO GET AN ABORTION!
NO!!
DAMN IT... THAT'S MY KID THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT!
HOW CAN YOU HAVE THE CHILD OF A MAN WHO WOULD RUN OFF AND LEAVE HIS WIFE!?
B-BUT RYOUKO, SHE CAN'T RAISE A CHILD WITHOUT A FATHER...
RYOU-KO...
I THINK SHE SHOULD HAVE THE BABY.

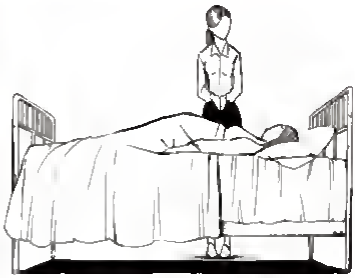

.....

PLEASE, MOTHER.


HUH?
SEKI-GUCHI-KUN!!
SO IT WAS RYOUKO WHO MOVED THE BED!


RYOUKO MOVED HER SISTER INTO THE LIBRARY, AND THE MOTHER STAYED AWAY.
AFTER THAT THE BOSS LADY GOT REAL QUIET.
IT WAS LIKE SHE JUST GAVE UP.


YEAH, SO...?
DIDN'T SHE SAY THAT SHE HAD NO MEMORY OF WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN THE AFTERNOON OF JANUARY 8TH AND THE NIGHT OF JANUARY 9TH?



OH...
SO SHE MUST HAVE GIVEN THE ORDER TO REPAIR THE DOOR DURING THE PERIOD OF TIME THAT SHE "FORGOT!"
I CAN'T WAIT TO GET OUT OF THIS SHITHOLE.
SO, OFFICER, AM I BEING CHARGED WITH A CRIME?
I TOLD YOU, I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING.
HA HA HA HE HE HE HE
PFF! HA HA!
GRRR
YOU'RE TRASH...
WHAT A PIECE OF SHIT...
AHAHAHA!!
GET HIM OUT OF HERE!!

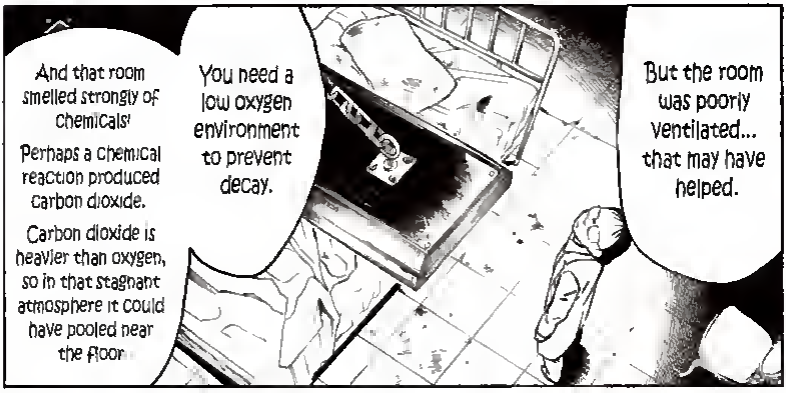
NAITOU-KUN...
YOU SHOULD WATCH YOUR BACK.
YOU'LL NEVER BE FREE FROM KUONJI MAKIO'S CURSE.
SLAM
WHAT!?
NO!!

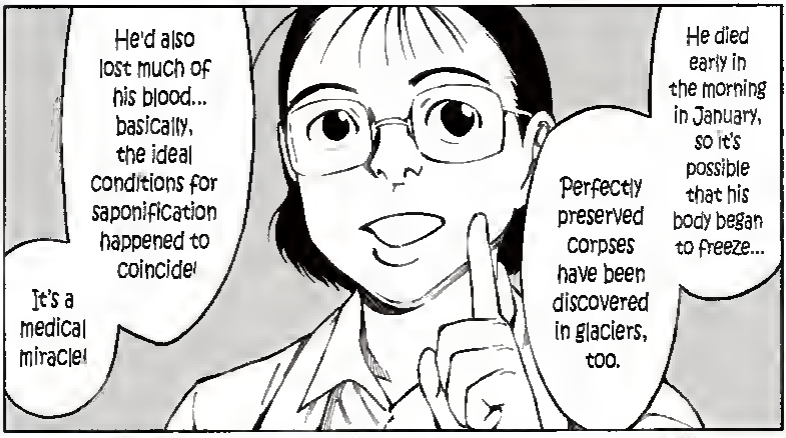
UNLESS HE SINCERELY REPENTS, HE'LL CARRY FUJIMAKI'S CURSE UNTIL THE DAY HE DIES.
SCARY ...
THAT WAS A "CURSE."
IF THE LAW CAN'T PUNISH HIM, THEN I WILL.
WHAT WAS THAT ALL ABOUT?
ARE YOU DONE WITH THE AUTOPSY REPORT!?
grin
Indeed. And what a lovely corpse it was!
Ah, there you are!
DR. SATO-MURA!

IT SAPONIFIED!?
BUT THAT'S...
You see, the entire body had saponified!
It's quite fascinating!
SAPO-WHAT?
Yes, under the right conditions, the unsaturated fats in the body undergo alkaline hydrolysis to produce stearic acid, palmitic acid and glycerol...
THE RIGHT CONDITIONS?
Under the right conditions, a corpse will saponify without rotting.
During saponification, the corpse undergoes chemical transformation into a wax-like substance called "adipocere."
Fufufu, I got carried away.
TOO MUCH INFORMATION!

NOTE The girl above is Rosalia Lombardo, a Italian child who died in 1920. Her body was placed in a glass coffin in the church catacombs, but thanks to embalming and the cold environment, the corpse saponified into adipocere and is still in remarkably lifelike condition today. After almost a century, she's starting to open her eyes... The Catholic church keeps the saponified bodies of many centuries-old saints on display, although they do tend to decompose a bit after a few decades.

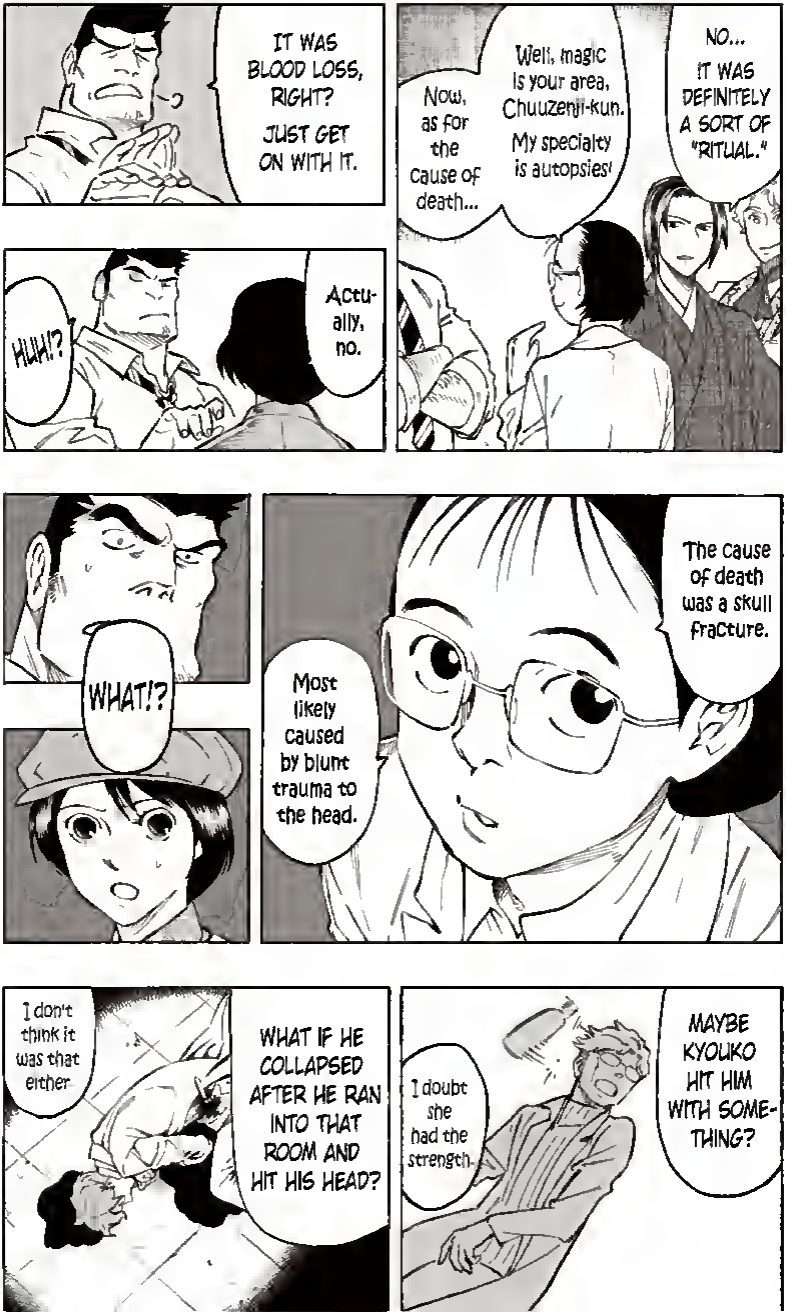
Most cases of saponification occur when the corpse is submerged in water.
If it's humid but too warm, the body will simply rot.
But if it's too dry, the body will mummify.
Anyway, you need cool temperatures and high humidity.

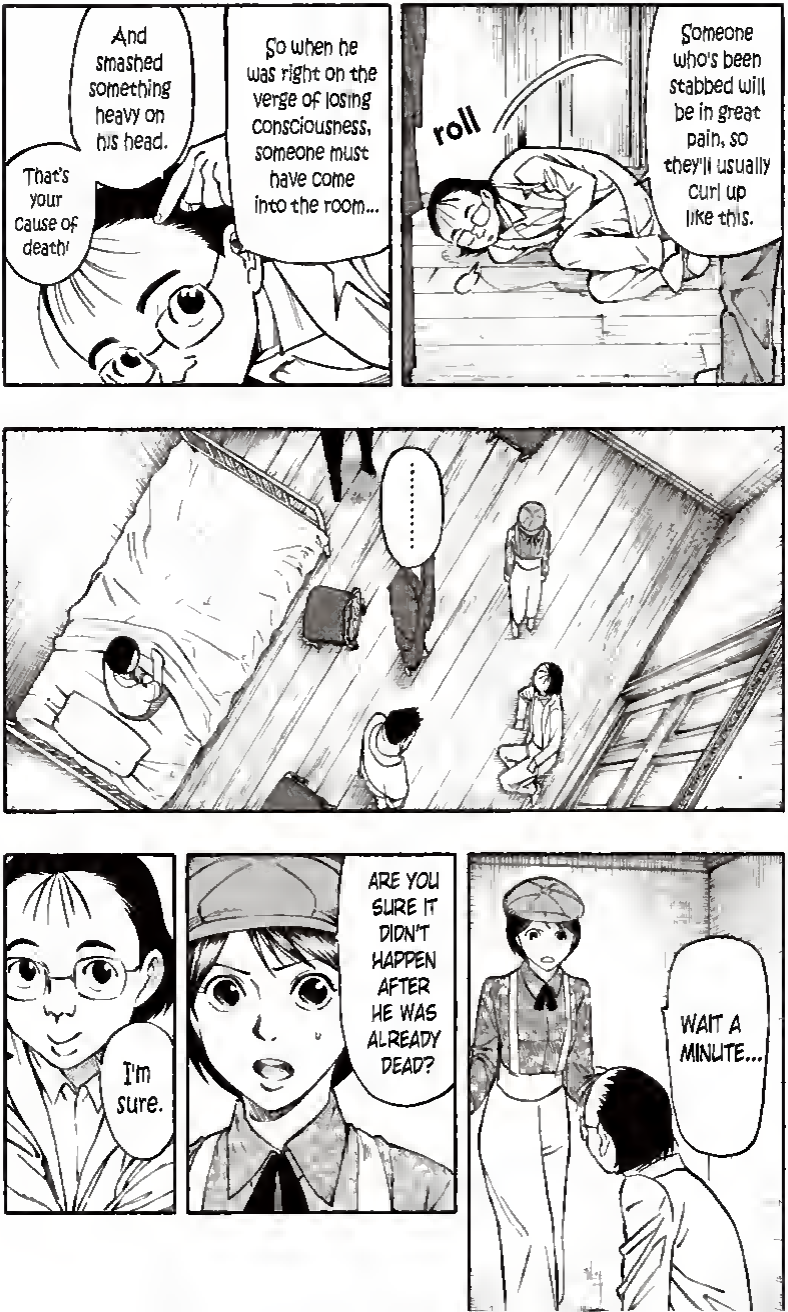

And that room smelled strongly of chemicals!
Perhaps a chemical reaction produced carbon dioxide.
Carbon dioxide is heavier than oxygen, so in that stagnant atmosphere it could have pooled near the floor.
You need a low oxygen environment to prevent decay.
But the room was poorly ventilated... that may have helped.


He'd also lost much of his blood... basically, the ideal conditions for saponification happened to coincide!
It's a medical miracle!
Perfectly preserved corpses have been discovered in glaciers, too.
He died early in the morning in January, so it's possible that his body began to freeze...

NOTE Saponification of corpses is actually quite common! The corpse turns into a waxy, soap-like substance. It's most likely to occur in corpses with a high percentage of body fat: women, children and the obese. Modern embalming techniques also make saponification likely, but it can occur in nature. A saponified corpse can last for centuries, but mold, dessication and discoloration will make it look pretty nasty after a while. Google at your own risk

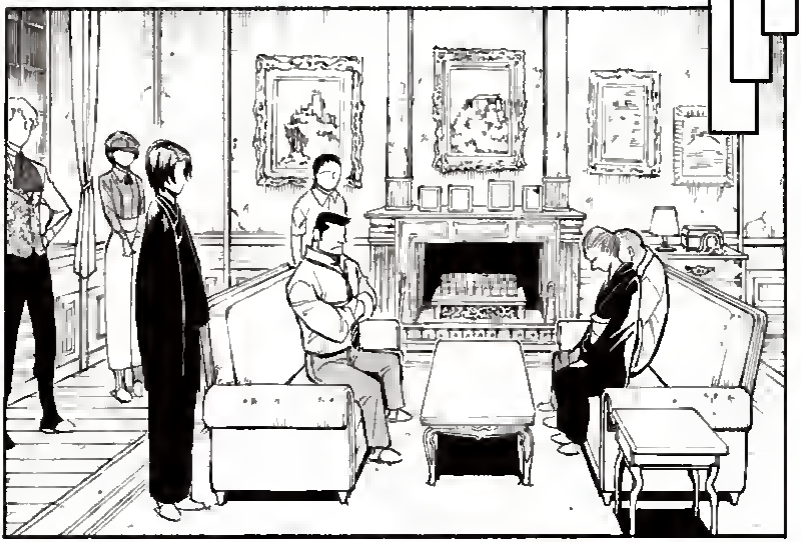
Aha!
That explains why the dead mice were preserved.
I knew that was related to the case somehow!
EVERY-THING IS MADE TO STAY COOL AND AIRTIGHT.
ACTUALLY, I SUSPECT THAT ALL THE ROOMS IN THE KUONJI CLINIC ARE IDEAL FOR CORPSE PRESER-VATION.
WHO CARES ABOUT THAT!?
GET ON WITH YOUR REPORT, SATOMURA!
A sapon-ified mouse?
I want to see that!
THEY MUST HAVE DIED SOON AFTER MAKIO-SAN DID...
YOU MEAN THE MICE IN THE LAB?
OR MAYBE THE PERSON USING IT DIDN'T KNOW THAT IT WOULD EVAPORATE?
Yes, but it wouldn't have done much good in such a small quantity.
Perhaps it had a symbolic purpose?
YOU MEAN THE PRESER-VATIVE?
Formalin
Oh, right.
I also found traces of formaldehyde on the body.

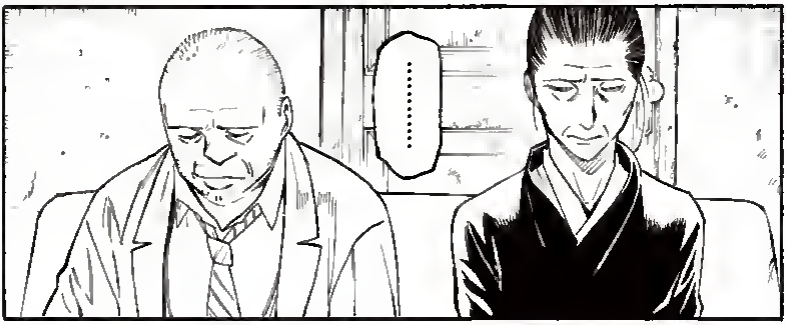

IT WAS BLOOD LOSS, RIGHT?
JUST GET ON WITH IT.
NO... IT WAS DEFINITELY A SORT OF "RITUAL."
Well, magic is your area, Chuuzenji-kun.
My specialty is autopsies!
Now, as for the cause of death...
Actually, no.
HUH!?
The cause of death was a skull fracture.
Most likely caused by blunt trauma to the head.
WHAT!?
MAYBE KYOUKO HIT HIM WITH SOMETHING?
I doubt she had the strength.
WHAT IF HE COLLAPSED AFTER HE RAN INTO THAT ROOM AND HIT HIS HEAD?
I don't think it was that either


And smashed something heavy on his head.
That's your cause of death!
So when he was right on the verge of losing consciousness, someone must have come into the room...
roll
Someone who's been stabbed will be in great pain, so they'll usually curl up like this.
.....
I'm sure.
ARE YOU SURE IT DIDN'T HAPPEN AFTER HE WAS ALREADY DEAD?
WAIT A MINUTE...

AND IN THAT TIME, SOMEONE WENT INTO THE LOCKED ROOM AND FINISHED HIM OFF!
HOW LONG DO YOU THINK IT WOULD HAVE TAKEN FOR HIM TO BLEED TO DEATH?
Oh, I'd say 15-30 minutes.
She really got him good
SO YOU'RE SAYING THERE WAS A SPACE OF 15-30 MINUTES BETWEEN WHEN FUJIMAKI-SAN WAS STABBED AND WHEN HE DIED...?
Ha ha ha!!
Hey, I'm a doctor, not a detective.
That's what the evidence says.
That's my theory!
WHAT THE HELL, SATOMURA!?
THAT'S CRAZY!

So we finally have a classic locked room murder mystery!!
SIGH!

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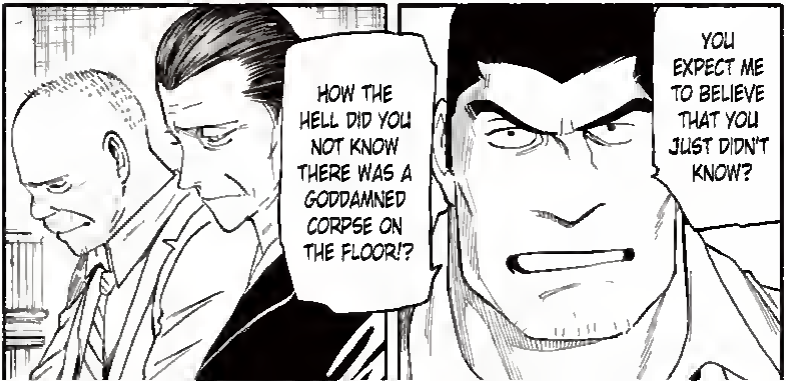
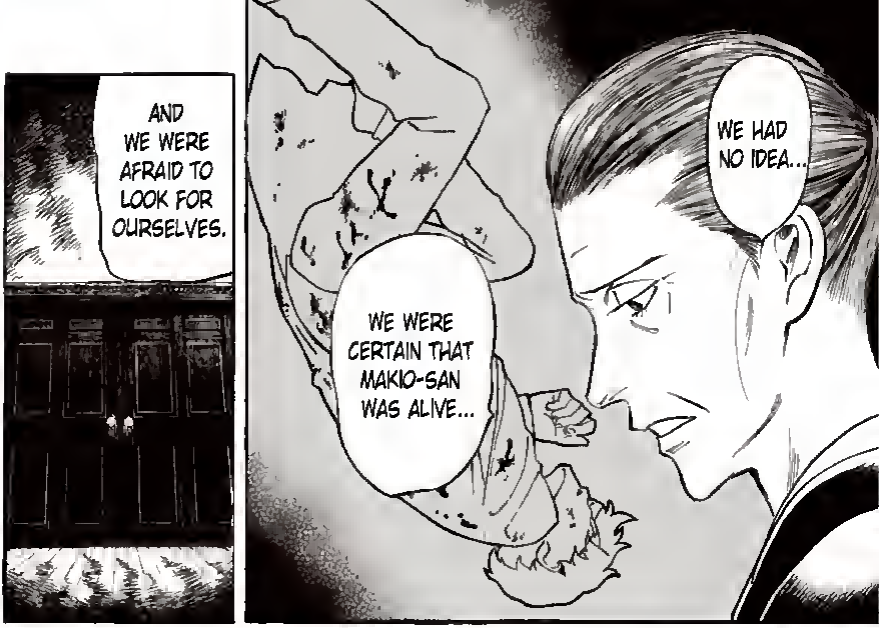
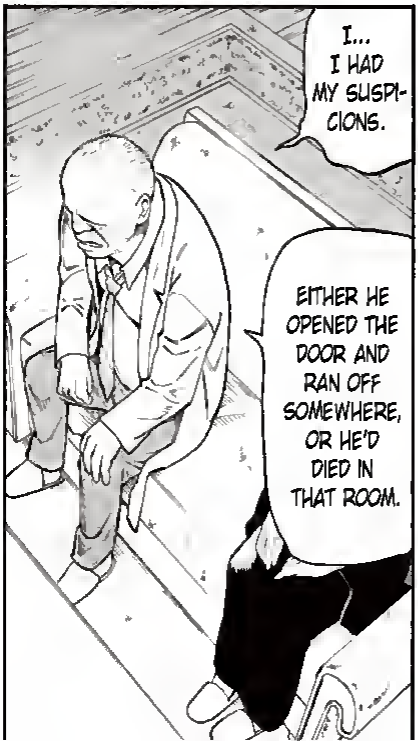
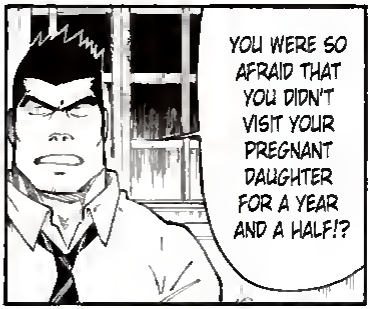
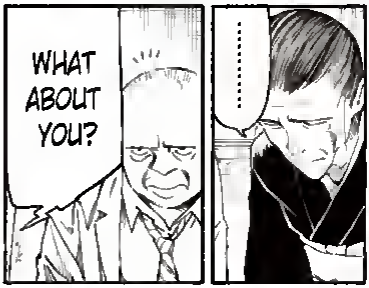

HOW THE HELL DID YOU NOT KNOW THERE WAS A GODDAMNED CORPSE ON THE FLOOR!?
YOU EXPECT ME TO BELIEVE THAT YOU JUST DIDN'T KNOW?


AND WE WERE AFRAID TO LOOK FOR OURSELVES.
WE HAD NO IDEA...
WE WERE CERTAIN THAT MAKIO-SAN WAS ALIVE...

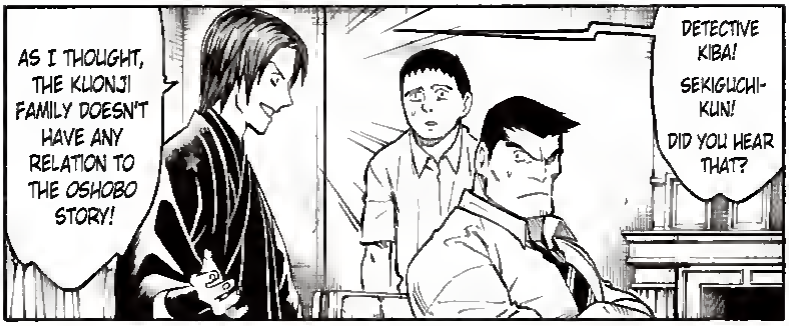

I... I HAD MY SUSPICIONS.
EITHER HE OPENED THE DOOR AND RAN OFF SOMEWHERE, OR HE'D DIED IN THAT ROOM.


YOU WERE SO AFRAID THAT YOU DIDN'T VISIT YOUR PREGNANT DAUGHTER FOR A YEAR AND A HALF!?

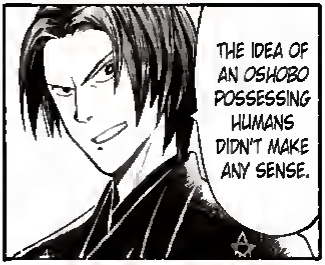

WHAT ABOUT YOU?
.....

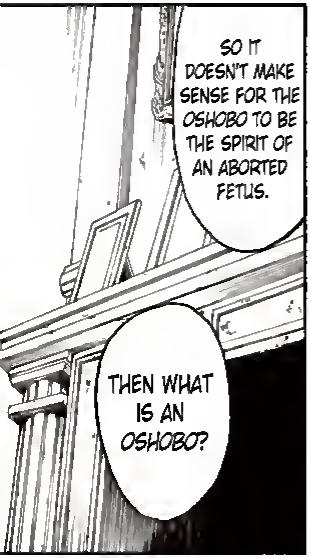
SO YOU JUST IGNORED THE ISSUE?
HOW LONG DID YOU THINK YOU COULD KEEP THAT UP!?
WHATEVER HAPPENED, WE WERE IN TROUBLE.
EITHER MY DAUGHTER WAS A MURDERER, OR MY SON-IN-LAW FAKED HIS OWN DEATH.
SO...
I WAS TIRED OF IT A DECADE AGO.
...I WAS TIRED.
I WAS TIRED OF TRYING TO KEEP THE KUONJI FAMILY OUT OF RUIN.
TCH
WHATEVER, DO WHAT YOU WANT.
DETECTIVE KIBA, IF YOU DON'T MIND, I'D LIKE TO ASK SOME QUESTIONS
THEY AREN'T NECESSARILY RELATED TO THIS CASE, BUT I'D STILL LIKE TO TIE UP A FEW LOOSE ENDS.
I SEE...

YES.
MY MOTHER AND I WERE BORN IN TOKYO SO WE ESCAPED THOSE RUMORS, BUT MY GRAND-MOTHER WAS PERSECUTED BECAUSE OF IT.
VERY WELL.
MA'AM . IS IT TRUE THAT THE KUONJIS HAVE A HISTORY OF POSSESSION?
THAT WAS THE RUMOR IN YOUR HOME VILLAGE IN SANUKI, CORRECT?
THOSE WORDS YOU SPOKE HAVE BEEN HANDED DOWN IN MY FAMILY FOR GENERATIONS...
MY MOTHER SAID THAT THEY WERE NEVER TO BE SPOKEN.
I SUSPECTED THAT THE KUONJIS WERE ONCE PRACTI-CIONERS OF ONMYOUDOU.
I CALL UPON THE ALL-PER-VADING DEITIES
IT WAS A CHANT THAT'S USED IN THE ANCIENT ONMYOUDOU RITUALS OF SHIKOKU.
LAST NIGHT, YOU RECOGNIZED ONE OF MY CHANTS.
OSHOBO?
I'M SURE I'VE HEARD THE WORD BEFORE, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS.
I SEE.
AND ARE YOU AWARE OF A SPIRIT KNOWN AS THE OSHOBO?

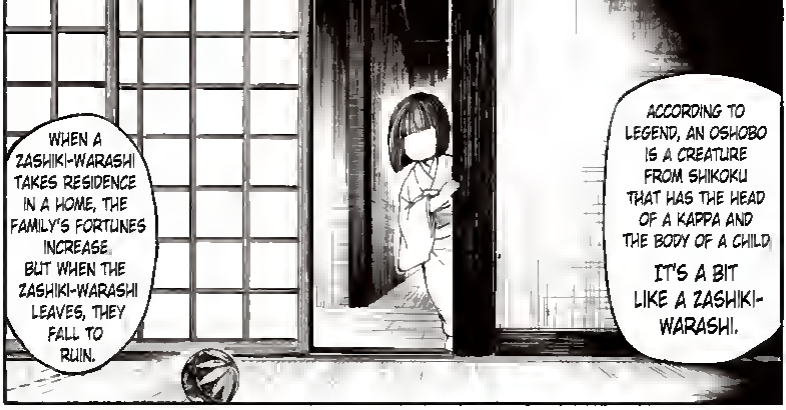

AS I THOUGHT, THE KUONJI FAMILY DOESN'T HAVE ANY RELATION TO THE OSHOBO STORY!
DETECTIVE KIBA!
SEKIGUCHI-KUN!
DID YOU HEAR THAT?

FOR PERFORMING ABORTIONS AND USING THE DEAD BABIES TO CURSE PEOPLE...
HUH?
BUT THE LOCAL COPS IN SANUKI TOLD ME THAT THE KUONJIS HAD A REPUTATION...

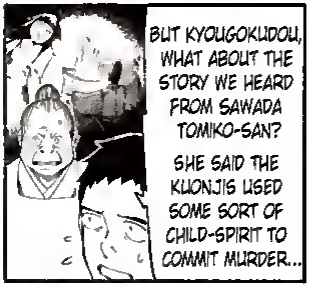

THE IDEA OF AN OSHOBO POSSESSING HUMANS DIDN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.

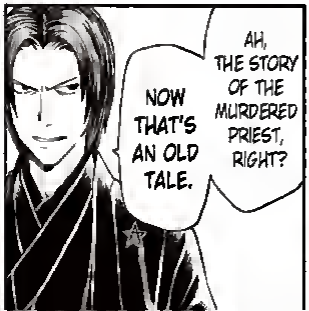

SO IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE FOR THE OSHOBO TO BE THE SPIRIT OF AN ABORTED FETUS.
THEN WHAT IS AN OSHOBO?

IT'S ONLY QUITE RECENTLY THAT ANYONE HAS MADE A FUSS ABOUT BABIES OR ABORTIONS.
WHY, BACK IN THE EDO PERIOD, THEY DIDN'T EVEN BOTHER WITH FUNERALS FOR CHILDREN.
AH, BUT THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.

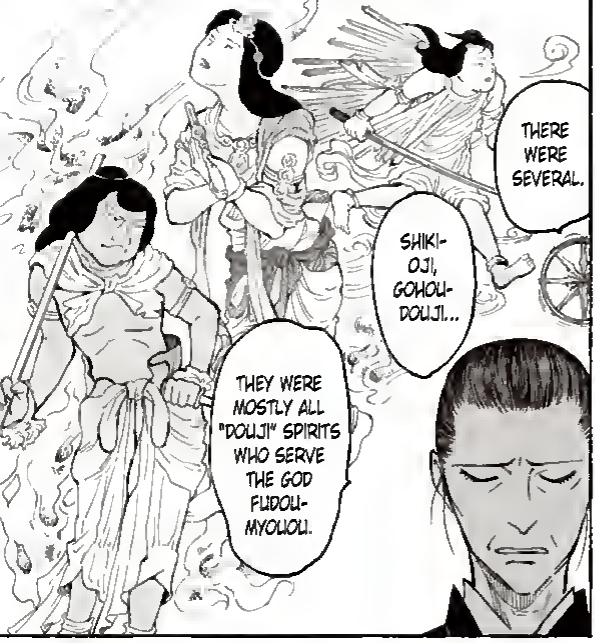

WHEN A ZASHIKI-WARASHI TAKES RESIDENCE IN A HOME, THE FAMILY'S FORTUNES INCREASE. BUT WHEN THE ZASHIKI-WARASHI LEAVES, THEY FALL TO RUIN.
ACCORDING TO LEGEND, AN OSHOBO IS A CREATURE FROM SHIKOKU THAT HAS THE HEAD OF A KAPPA AND THE BODY OF A CHILD
IT'S A BIT LIKE A ZASHIKI-WARASHI.

...SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?
SO WHILE A ZASHIKI-WARASHI CAN BE SAID TO POSSESS FAMILIES, IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE FOR THE FAMILY TO WANT IT TO POSSESS SOMEONE ELSE!


BUT KYOUGOKUDOU, WHAT ABOUT THE STORY WE HEARD FROM SAWADA TOMIKO-SAN?
SHE SAID THE KUONJIS USED SOME SORT OF CHILD-SPIRIT TO COMMIT MURDER...


AH, THE STORY OF THE MURDERED PRIEST, RIGHT?
NOW THAT'S AN OLD TALE.

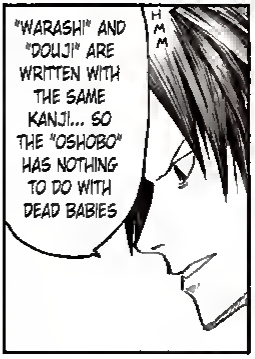
WELL, IT MEANS THAT THE RUMOR IN SANUKI IS PROBABLY A RATHER RECENT FABRICATION, BASED ON SOME OTHER STORY THAT HAS BEEN FORGOTTEN.


THERE WERE SEVERAL.
SHIKI-OJI, GOHOU-DOUJI...
THEY WERE MOSTLY ALL "DOUJI" SPIRITS WHO SERVE THE GOD FUDOU-MYOUOU.

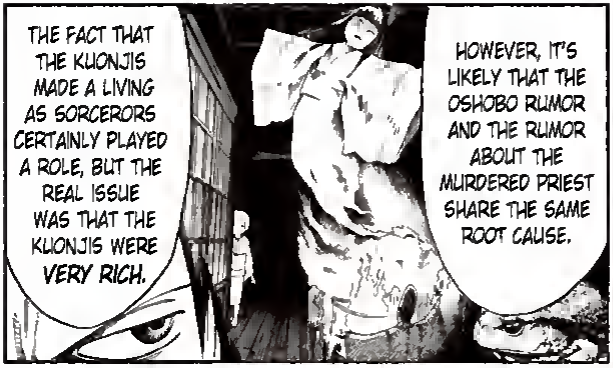
MA'AM, DO YOU KNOW WHAT SORT OF SPIRITS YOUR ANCESTORS USED IN THEIR RITUALS?

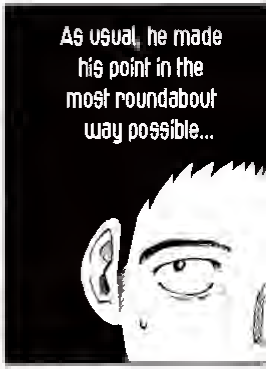
UH... OKAY.

I BELIEVE THAT THE STORY ABOUT THE KUONJIS USING OSHOBO TO CURSE THEIR ENEMIES IS LITTLE MORE THAN A FALSE RUMOR.
SO LET'S ABANDON THAT LINE OF INVESTI-GATION.


HMM
"WARASHI" AND "DOUJI" ARE WRITTEN WITH THE SAME KANJI... SO THE "OSHOBO" HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH DEAD BABIES

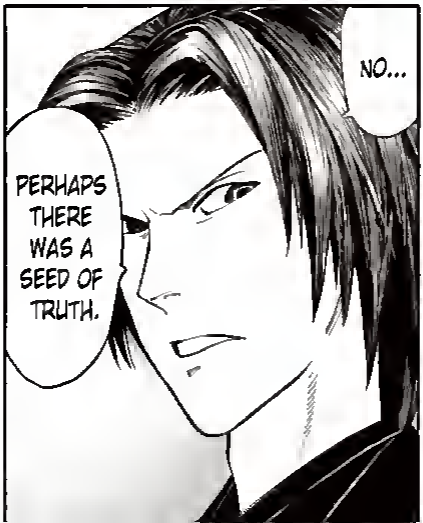
WHAT!?
DETEC-TIVE KIBA!

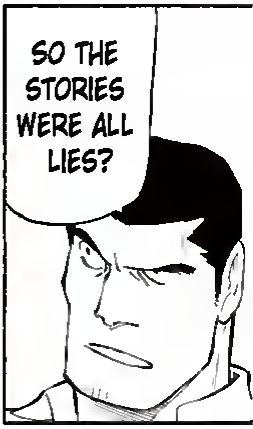

THE FACT THAT THE KUONJIS MADE A LIVING AS SORCERORS CERTAINLY PLAYED A ROLE, BUT THE REAL ISSUE WAS THAT THE KUONJIS WERE VERY RICH.
HOWEVER, IT'S LIKELY THAT THE OSHOBO RUMOR AND THE RUMOR ABOUT THE MURDERED PRIEST SHARE THE SAME ROOT CAUSE.


As usual, he made his point in the most roundabout way possible...

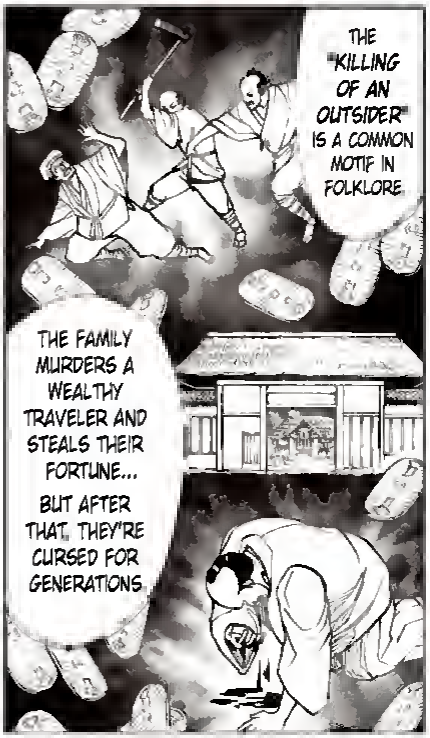
SO TALES OF MURDER AND MAGIC WERE USED TO SLANDER A FAMILY THAT HAD SUDDENLY GROWN MUCH RICHER THAN THE REST OF THEIR COMMUNITY.
THE FAMILY GAINED WEALTH AND POWER AS PALACE PHYSICIANS... BUT THEY ALSO MADE ENEMIES.

A SEED OF TRUTH?


NO...
PERHAPS THERE WAS A SEED OF TRUTH.

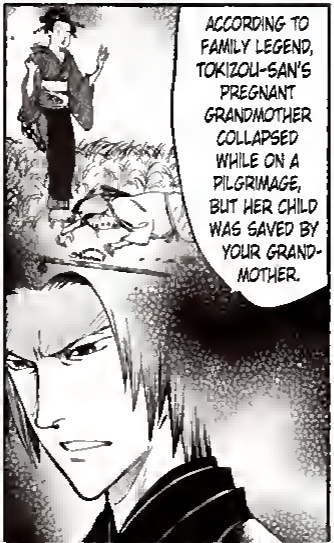

SO THE STORIES WERE ALL LIES?

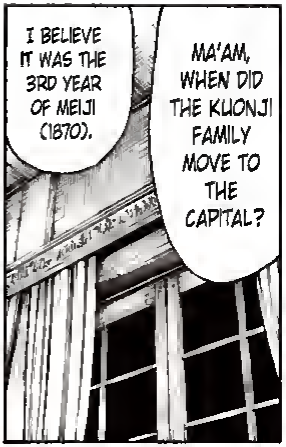
SO THE STORY ABOUT THE KUONJIS KILLING A PRIEST FITS THAT MOTIF.

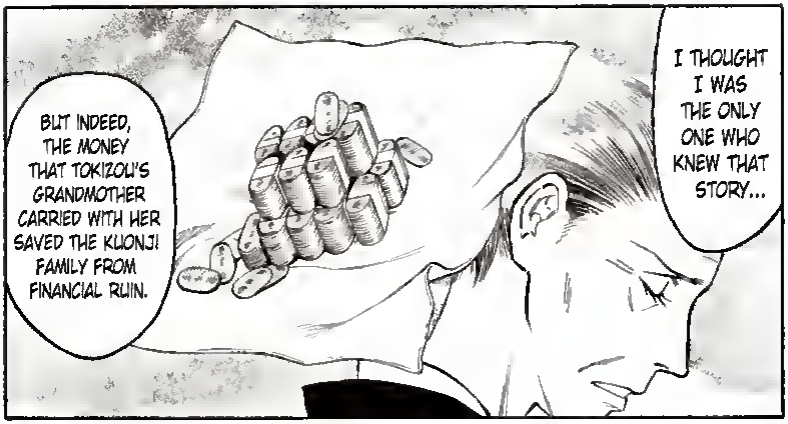

THE "KILLING OF AN OUTSIDER" IS A COMMON MOTIF IN FOLKLORE.
THE FAMILY MURDERS A WEALTHY TRAVELER AND STEALS THEIR FORTUNE...
BUT AFTER THAT, THEY'RE CURSED FOR GENERATIONS.

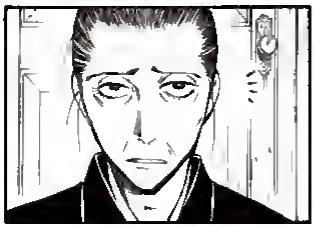
BUT THERE'S ANOTHER STORY ABOUT THE KUONJIS THAT FOLLOWS THE SAME PATTERN:
"RICHES STOLEN FROM AN OUTSIDER."

.....
HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?

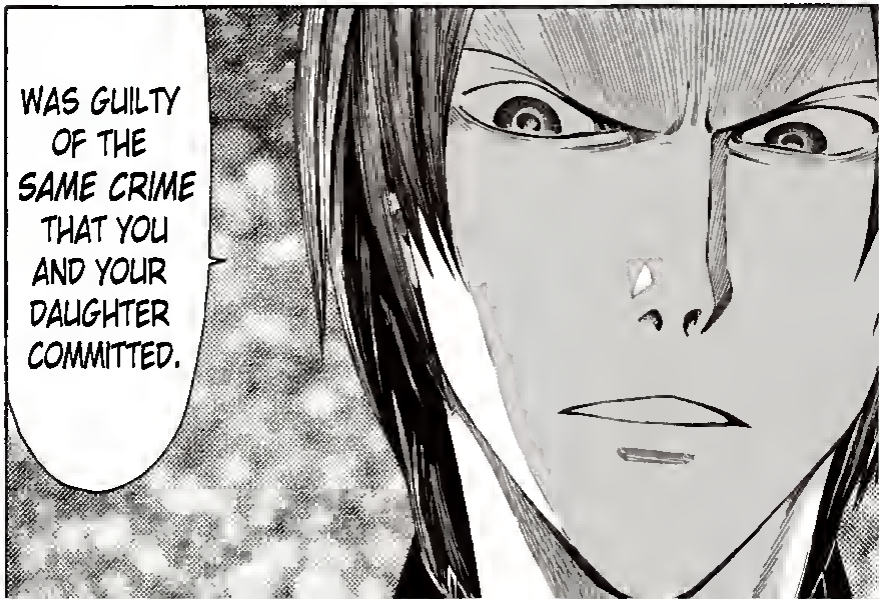

ACCORDING TO FAMILY LEGEND, TOKIZOU-SAN'S PREGNANT GRANDMOTHER COLLAPSED WHILE ON A PILGRIMAGE, BUT HER CHILD WAS SAVED BY YOUR GRAND-MOTHER.

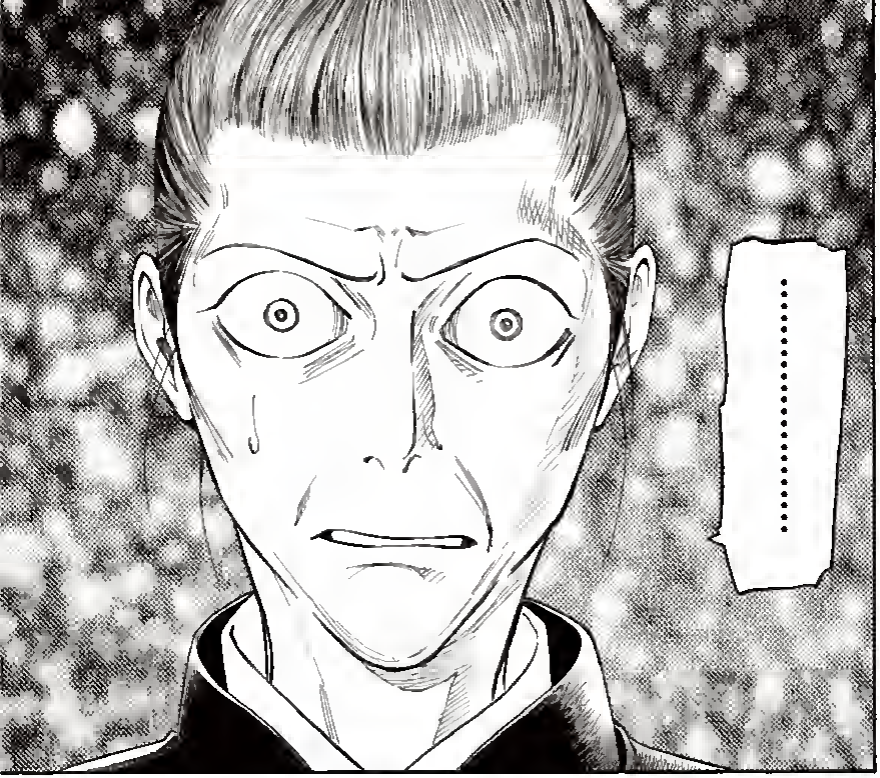

I BELIEVE IT WAS THE 3RD YEAR OF MEIJI (1870).
MA'AM, WHEN DID THE KUONJI FAMILY MOVE TO THE CAPITAL?


I THOUGHT I WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO KNEW THAT STORY...
BUT INDEED, THE MONEY THAT TOKIZOU'S GRANDMOTHER CARRIED WITH HER SAVED THE KUONJI FAMILY FROM FINANCIAL RUIN.



THIS IS ONLY SPECU-LATION, BUT...
I THINK THAT YOUR GRAND-MOTHER...


WAS GUILTY OF THE SAME CRIME THAT YOU AND YOUR DAUGHTER COMMITTED.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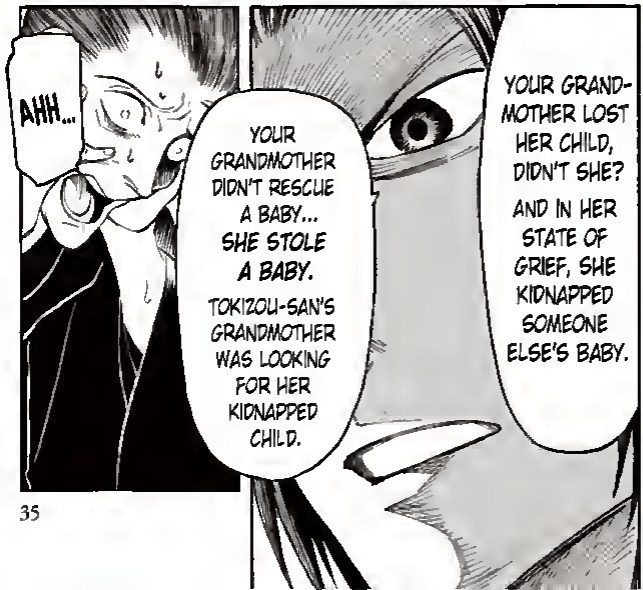
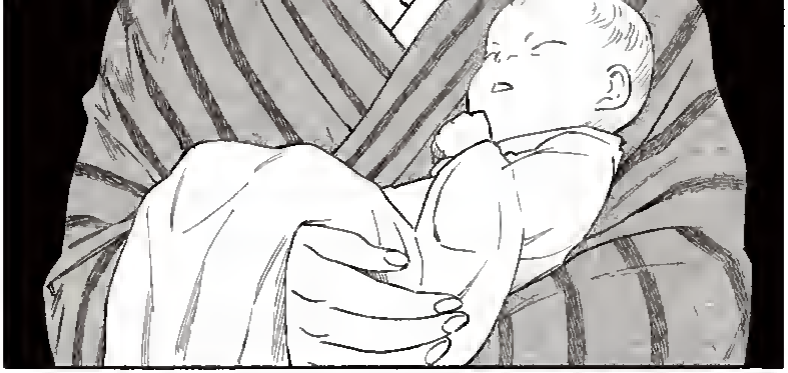
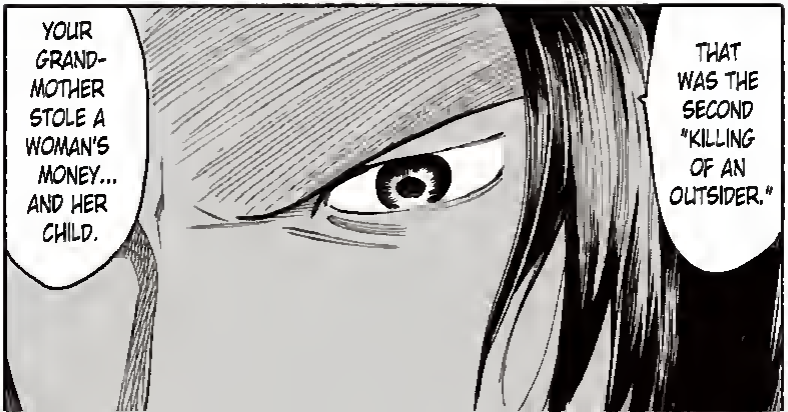

Huh!?
What is he talking about!?
YOUR GRAND-MOTHER LOST HER CHILD, DIDN'T SHE?
AND IN HER STATE OF GRIEF, SHE KIDNAPPED SOMEONE ELSE'S BABY.
AHH...
YOUR GRANDMOTHER DIDN'T RESCUE A BABY... SHE STOLE A BABY.
TOKIZOU-SAN'S GRANDMOTHER WAS LOOKING FOR HER KIDNAPPED CHILD.



YOUR GRAND-MOTHER KILLED HER,
AND TOOK THE MONEY SHE WAS CARRYING.


YOUR GRAND-MOTHER STOLE A WOMAN'S MONEY... AND HER CHILD.
THAT WAS THE SECOND "KILLING OF AN OUTSIDER."

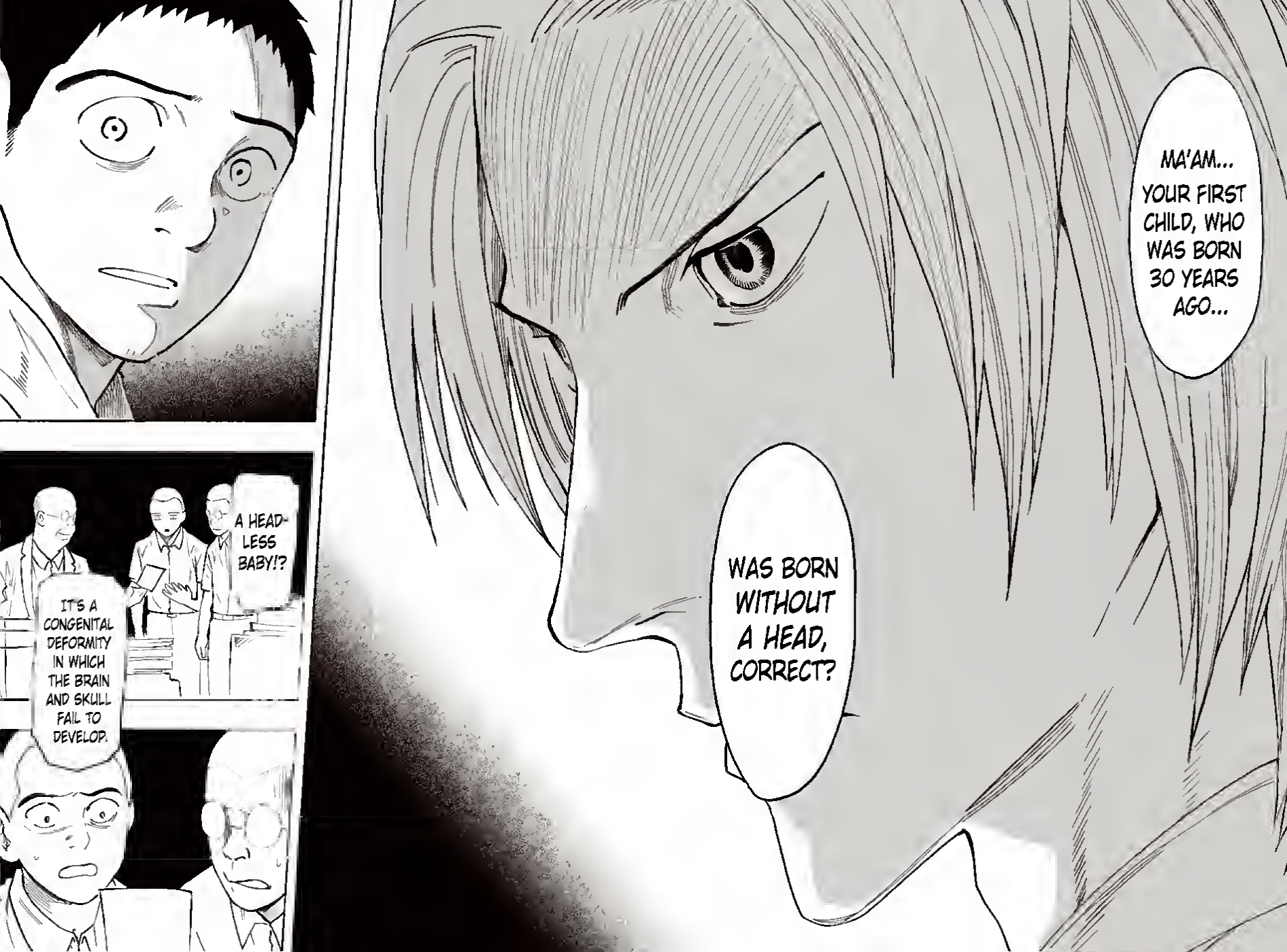
BUT WE COULD NEVER ESCAPE...
NO... YOU CHOSE NOT TO ESCAPE.
I DOUBT THAT SHE TRULY INTENDED TO COMMIT MURDER.
BUT THE VILLAGE WOULD HAVE BLAMED HER FOR IT ANYWAY, SO THE KUONJI FAMILY CUT TIES WITH THEIR FORMER HOME AND MOVED TO TOKYO.
THOSE WHO DO NOT LEARN FROM THE PAST...
ARE DOOMED TO REPEAT IT.
CAN YOU SLOW DOWN!?
OI, KYOU-GOKU, I'M LOST!

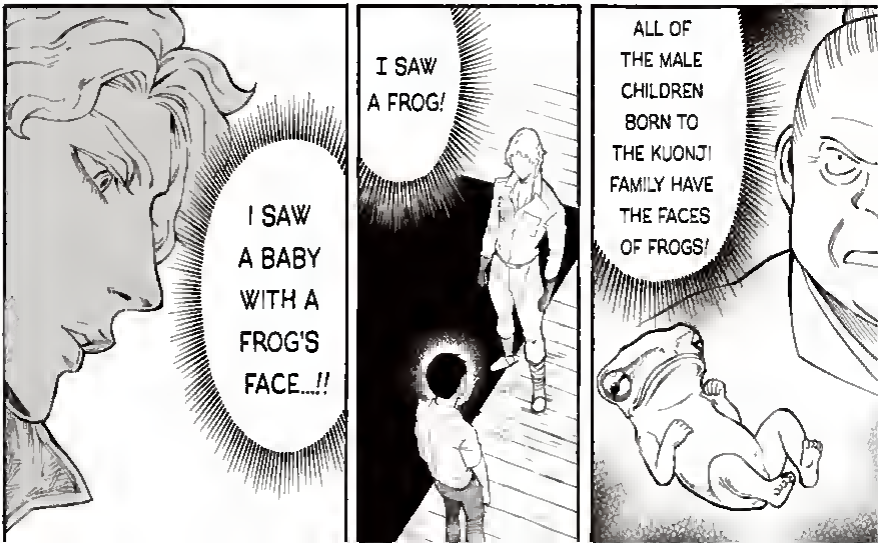
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT NOW, KYOUGOKU!?
YOUR GRANDMOTHER, FILLED WITH BOTH JOY AND SHAME, RAISED THE CHILD WHO WOULD BECOME TOKIZOU-SAN'S FATHER.
BUT WHEN IT WAS YOUR TURN TO DO THE SAME...
YOU FAILED.
WHAT!?
I'M TALKING ABOUT NAITOU-KUN.
MA'AM...
YOU TRIED TO STEAL ANOTHER WOMAN'S CHILD, DIDN'T YOU?
NAITOU-KUN'S MOTHER DIED BECAUSE OF YOU...
SHE HAD A WEAK HEART!
I SWEAR I DIDN'T MEAN TO!!
I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I WAS DOING...

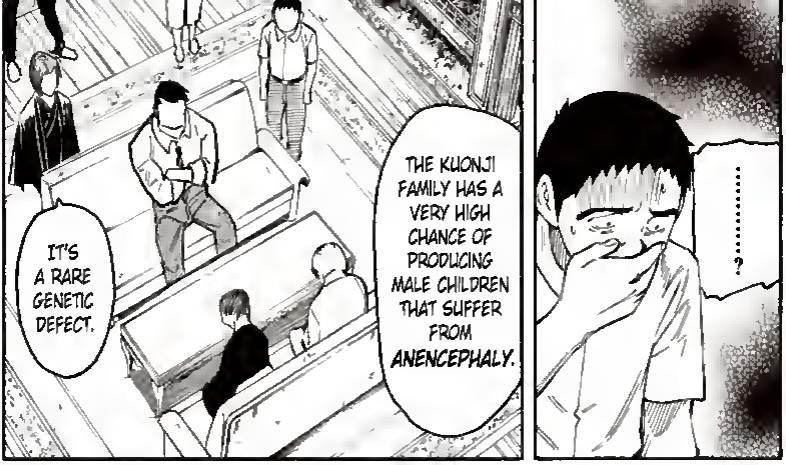
DIRECTOR, DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS?
I WANTED TO KEEP HIM, BUT MY MOTHER WOULDN'T ALLOW IT.
SO I PLANNED TO MARRY HIM TO ONE OF MY GIRLS.
I HAD MY SUSPICIONS WHEN NAITOU SUDDENLY SHOWED UP.
BUT IT SEEMED LIKE MY WIFE WANTED TO KEEP IT A SECRET, SO I DIDN'T ASK.
NO POINT IN MAKING A FUSS OVER IT.
.....
IT WOULD BE BEST IF THIS HOSPITAL ENDED WITH ME.
IF NAITOU HAD BEEN A BIT MORE TRUSTWORTHY, I WOULD HAVE MARRIED HIM TO ONE OF MY DAUGHTERS EVEN IF HE DIDN'T BECOME A DOCTOR.

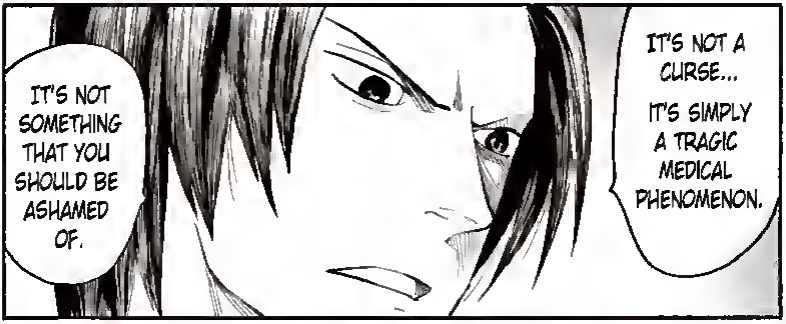
ALRIGHT, BUT I STILL HAVE QUESTIONS.
WHY DID YOU TAKE SOMEBODY ELSE'S KID?
MA'AM ...
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CHILD YOU BIRTHED WAS NOT THE WORK OF A CURSE OR AN EVIL SPIRIT.
BUT CLOSING OUR MOUTHS AND ALLOWING THE TRUTH TO FALL INTO DARKNESS... NOW THAT WOULD TRULY BE EVIL.
MA'AM, WILL YOU ALLOW ME TO UNCOVER THAT TRUTH?
BUT HOW...
HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO MY CHILD...?

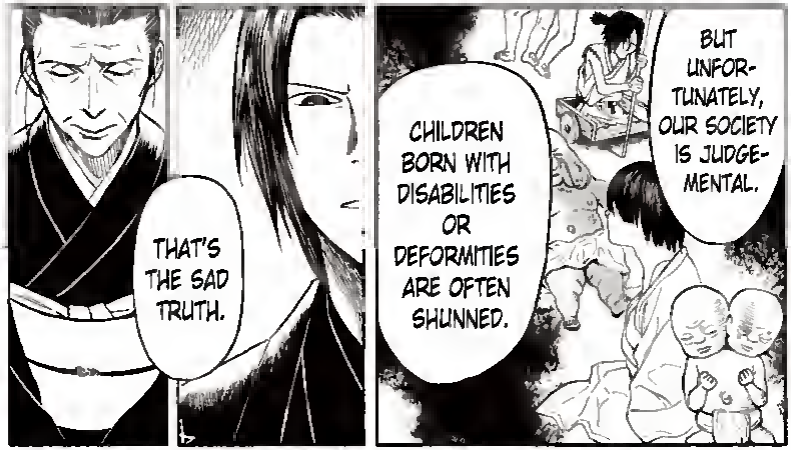
COULD YOU TELL ME ROUGHLY HOW MANY CHILDREN ARE BORN WITH THE SAME AFFLICTION AS YOUR FIRST CHILD?
DIREC-TOR...
I'VE SEEN TWO BABIES BORN WITH THE SAME DEFORMITY.
IT'S AN EXTR-EMELY RARE CONDITION ...
BUT I'VE SEEN IT TWICE.
.....
.....
NOD


MA'AM... YOUR FIRST CHILD, WHO WAS BORN 30 YEARS AGO...
WAS BORN WITHOUT A HEAD, CORRECT?
A HEAD-LESS BABY!?
IT'S A CONGENITAL DEFORMITY IN WHICH THE BRAIN AND SKULL FAIL TO DEVELOP.


I SAW A BABY WITH A FROG'S FACE...!!
I SAW A FROG!
ALL OF THE MALE CHILDREN BORN TO THE KUONJI FAMILY HAVE THE FACES OF FROGS!


IT'S A RARE GENETIC DEFECT.
THE KUONJI FAMILY HAS A VERY HIGH CHANCE OF PRODUCING MALE CHILDREN THAT SUFFER FROM ANENCEPHALY.
.....?

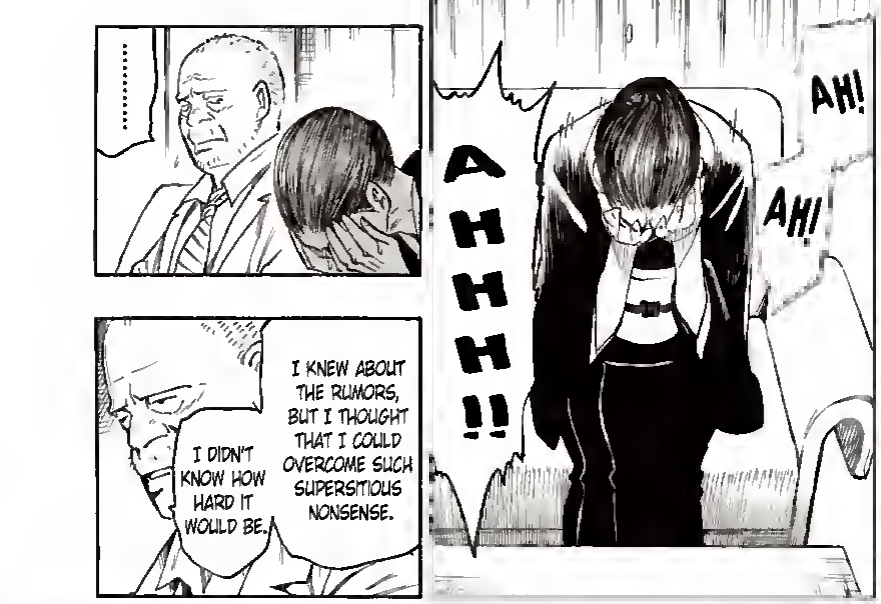


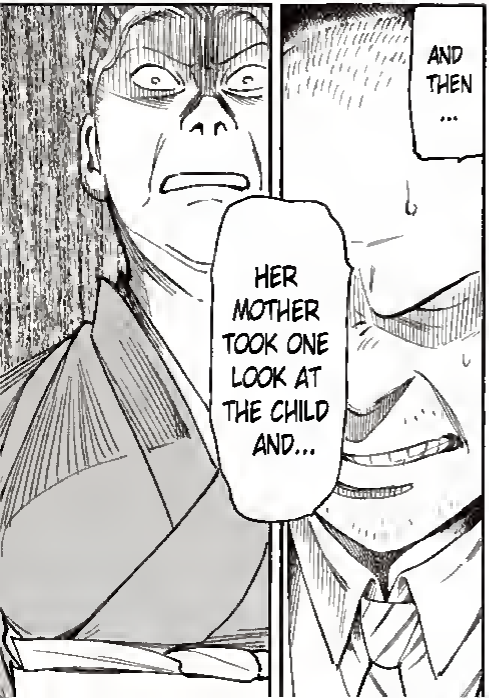

THAT'S THE SAD TRUTH.
CHILDREN BORN WITH DISABILITIES OR DEFORMITIES ARE OFTEN SHUNNED.
BUT UNFORTUNATELY, OUR SOCIETY IS JUDGEMENTAL.

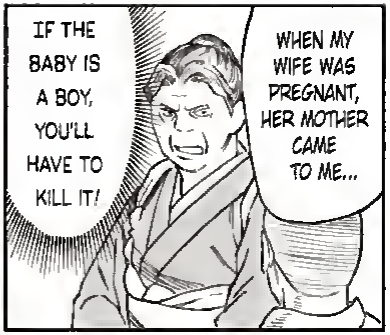
NOTE Anencephaly (Latin for "no brain") is a rare, fatal disorder of embryonic development that's usually caused by a lack of folic acid during pregnancy. Despite what Kyougokudou says, it's rarely caused by genetic factors. Babies born with anencephaly lack most of their brain and skull. While anencephaly occurs in 1 out of 10000 pregnancies, it usually results in miscarriage. Babies born with the disorder usually die soon after birth.

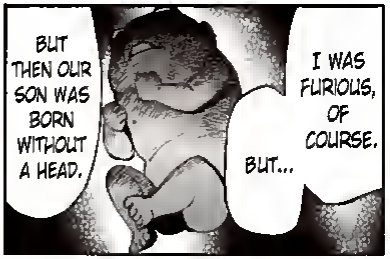
THIS WAS SIMPLY WHAT WAS DONE IN THE OLD DAYS.
BUT TIMES HAVE CHANGED.
UNFORTUNATELY, YOU AND YOUR MOTHER BOTH MAINTAINED THE OLD TRADITION.

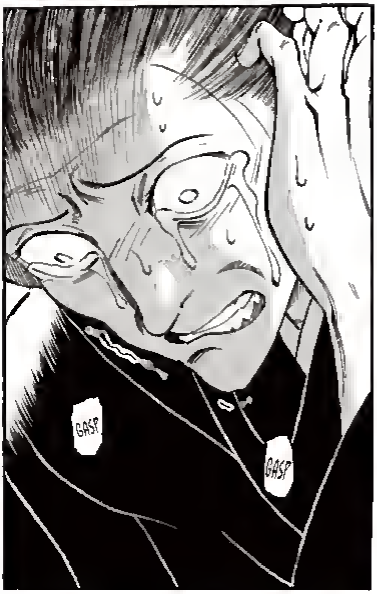
SOMETIMES, CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES OR DEFORMITIES ARE TREATED AS OMENS OF GOOD LUCK...
BUT USUALLY THEY'RE SEEN AS DEMONS OR MONSTERS, AND OFTENTIMES THEY'RE KILLED.
THE HEADLESS KUONJI CHILDREN WERE THOUGHT TO BE CURSED...
AND SO THEY WERE BORN AND BURIED IN DARKNESS.

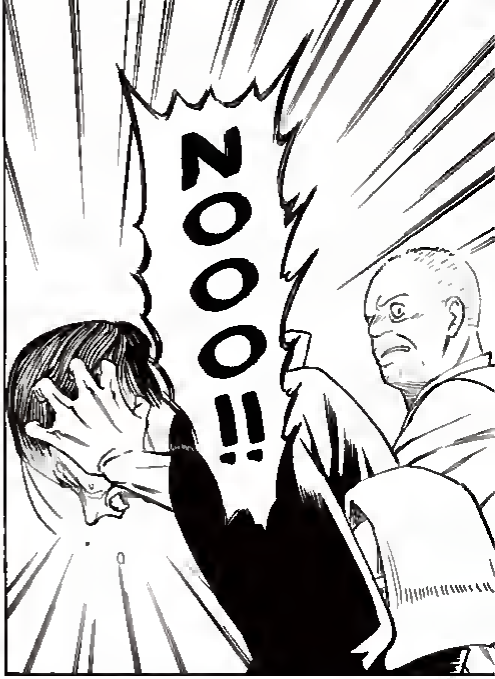

.....
AHHHH!!
AH!
AH!
I KNEW ABOUT THE RUMORS, BUT I THOUGHT THAT I COULD OVERCOME SUCH SUPERSITIOUS NONSENSE.
I DIDN'T KNOW HOW HARD IT WOULD BE.


AND THEN ...
HER MOTHER TOOK ONE LOOK AT THE CHILD AND...

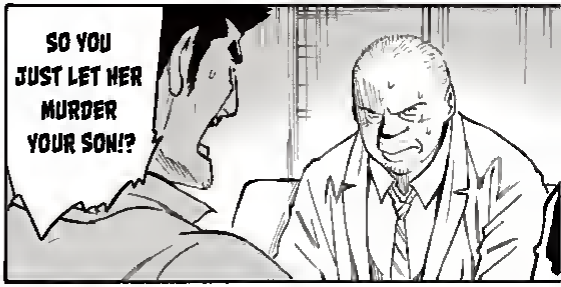

WHEN MY WIFE WAS PREGNANT, HER MOTHER CAME TO ME...
IF THE BABY IS A BOY, YOU'LL HAVE TO KILL IT!

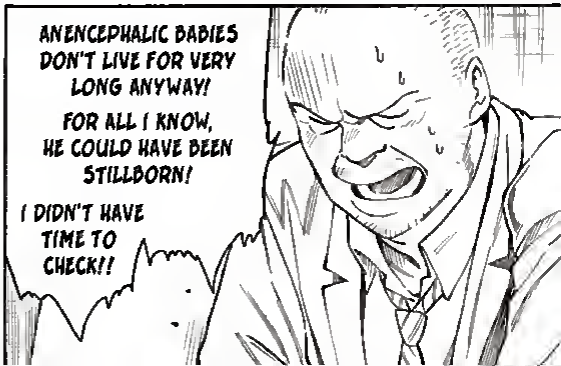

I WAS FURIOUS, OF COURSE.
BUT...
BUT THEN OUR SON WAS BORN WITHOUT A HEAD.


GASP
GASP

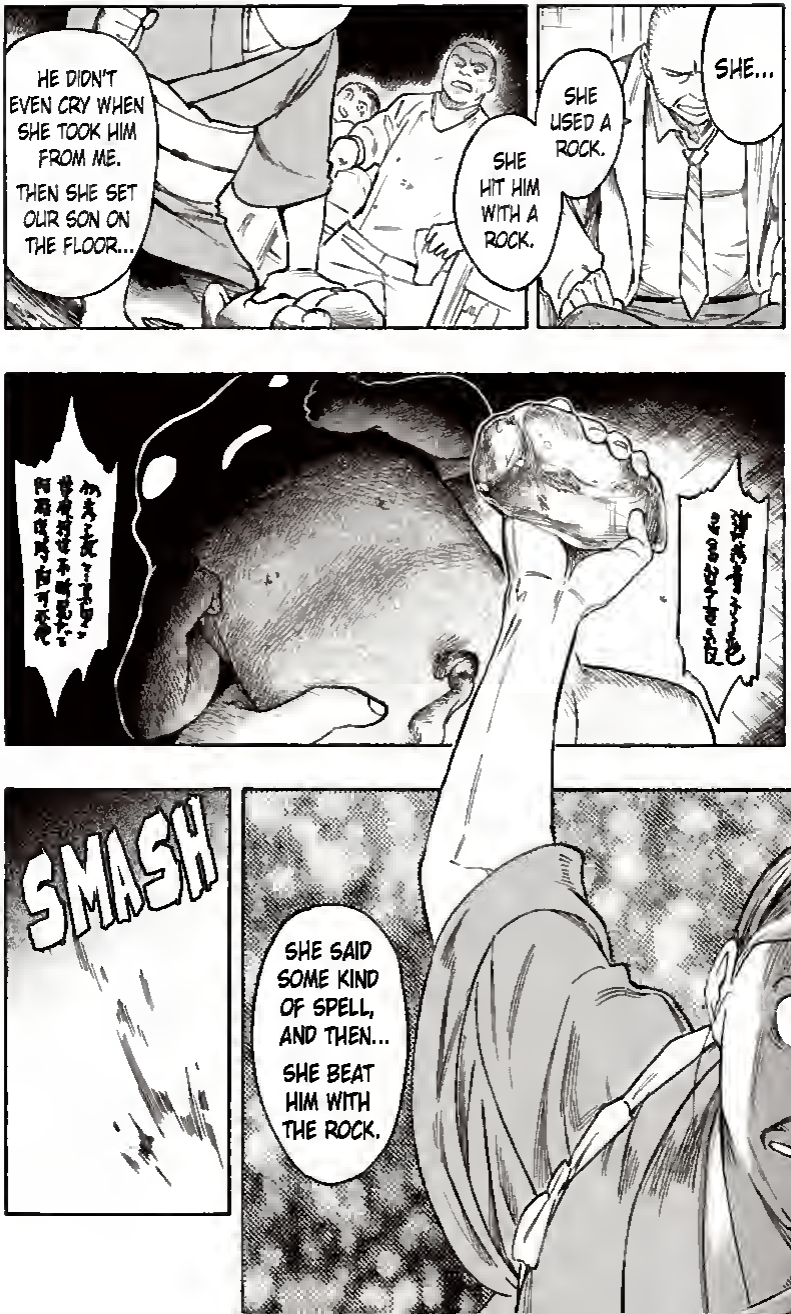

NOOO!!

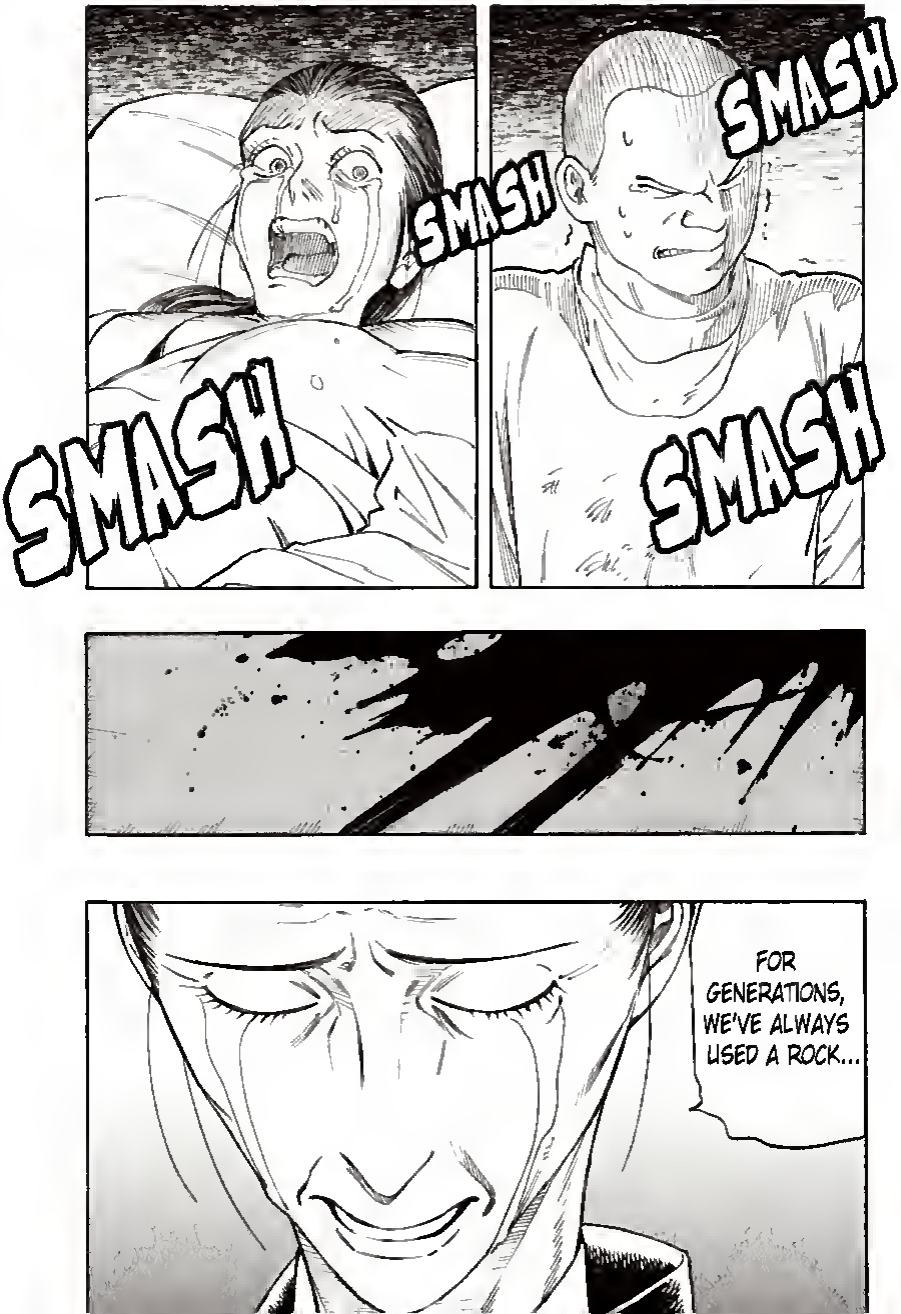
THAT'S NO EXCUSE !!
DETECTIVE KIBA...


SO YOU JUST LET HER MURDER YOUR SON!?

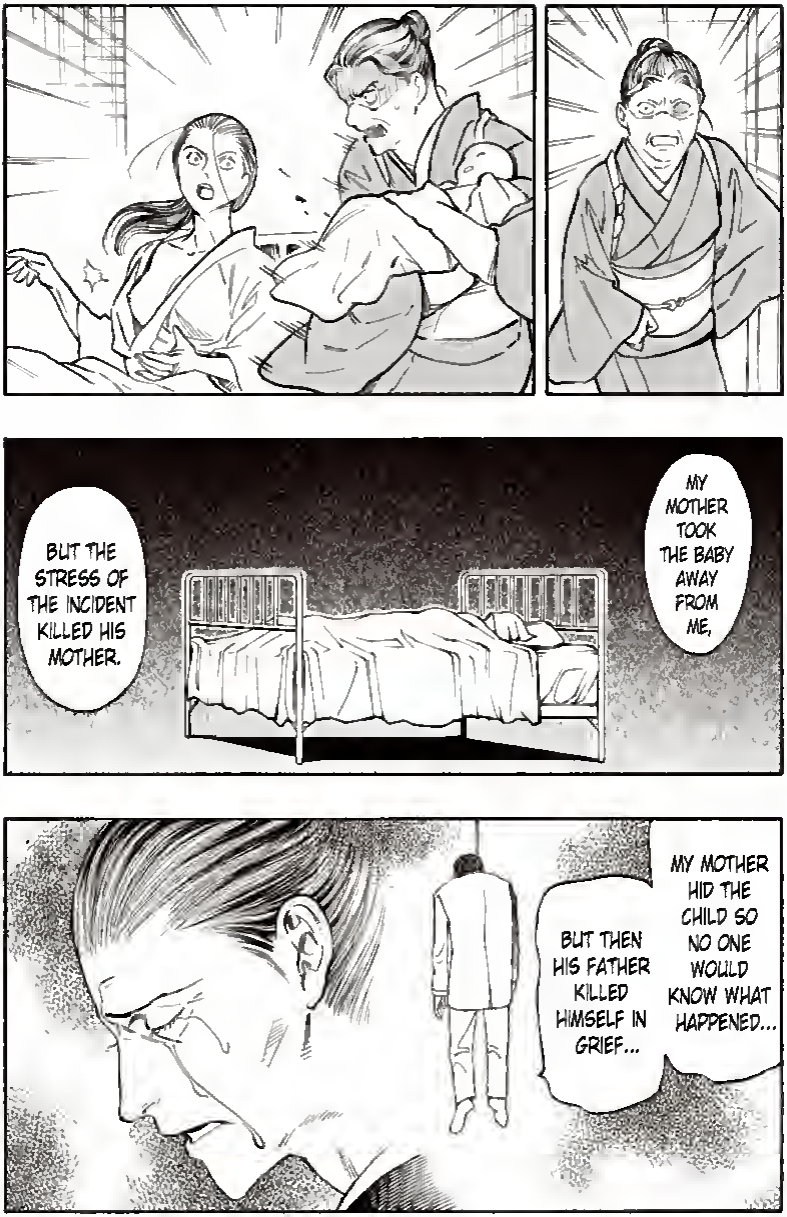

ANENCEPHALIC BABIES DON'T LIVE FOR VERY LONG ANYWAY!
FOR ALL I KNOW, HE COULD HAVE BEEN STILLBORN!
I DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO CHECK!!

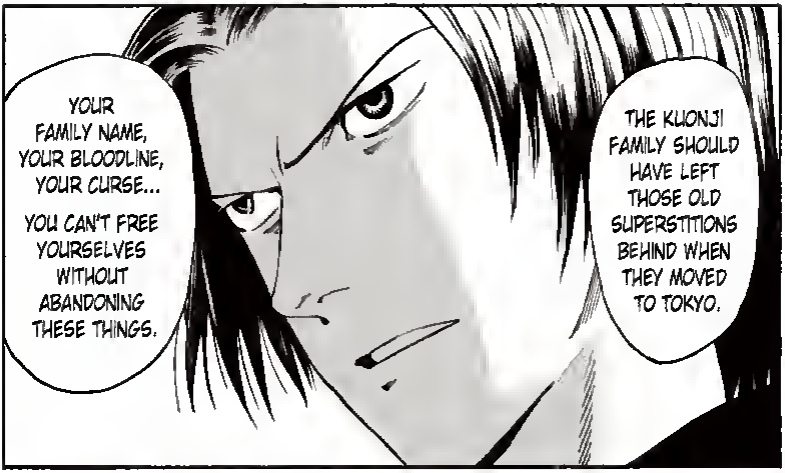
THEIR TRADITIONS DEMANDED THAT THE AFFECTED CHILDREN MUST BE KILLED.
THERE'S NO WAY TO PREDICT A GENETIC DEFECT, AND IF THEY'D ABSTAINED FROM HAVING CHILDREN, THE FAMILY WOULD HAVE DIED OUT.
WHATEVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, THIS COUPLE HAD TO WATCH THEIR CHILD DIE RIGHT BEFORE THEIR EYES.
I THINK THAT'S MORE THAN ENOUGH PUNISHMENT.
I KNOW IT'S PAINFUL TO TALK ABOUT, BUT I THINK IT MAY BE IMPORTANT TO THE MATTER AT HAND.
MAY I ASK HOW YOUR MOTHER-IN-LAW ENDED THE CHILD'S LIFE?
.....

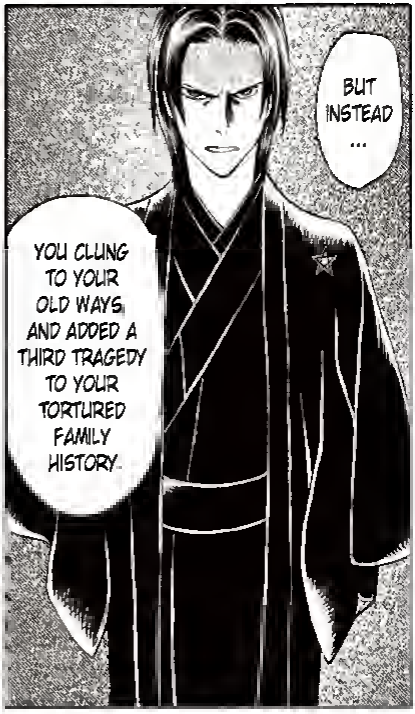

SHE...
SHE USED A ROCK.
SHE HIT HIM WITH A ROCK.
HE DIDN'T EVEN CRY WHEN SHE TOOK HIM FROM ME.
THEN SHE SET OUR SON ON THE FLOOR...
SMASH
SHE SAID SOME KIND OF SPELL, AND THEN...
SHE BEAT HIM WITH THE ROCK.

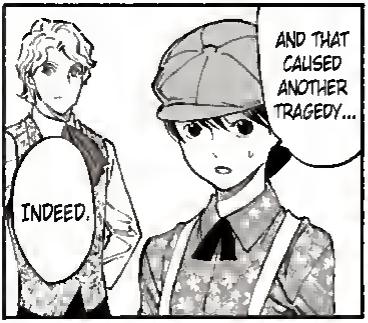

SMASH
SMASH
SMASH
SMASH
FOR GENERATIONS, WE'VE ALWAYS USED A ROCK...

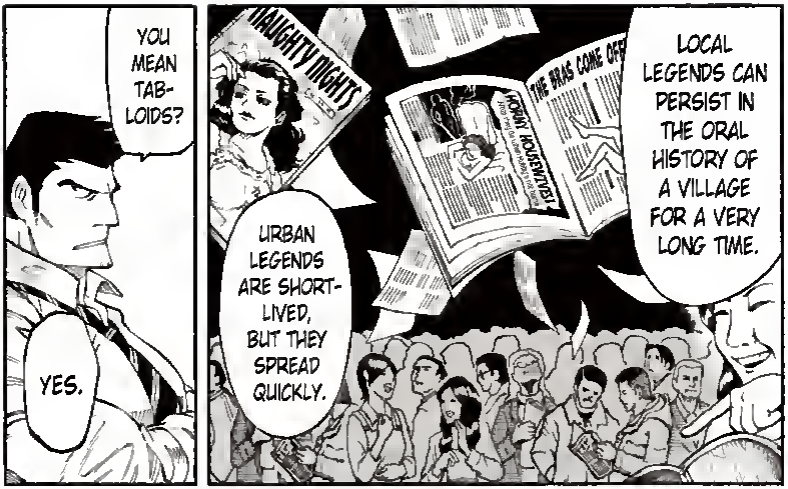
WAAAH!!
WAAAH!!
IT'S STRANGE... EVEN THOUGH MY CHILD WAS DEAD,
WHENEVER I HEARD A BABY CRY, I HAD THE OVER-WHELMING URGE TO CARE FOR IT.
AFTER A FEW DAYS IN THE HOSPITAL, I FOUND MYSELF NURSING SOMEONE ELSE'S CHILD...
THAT BABY WAS NAITOU.

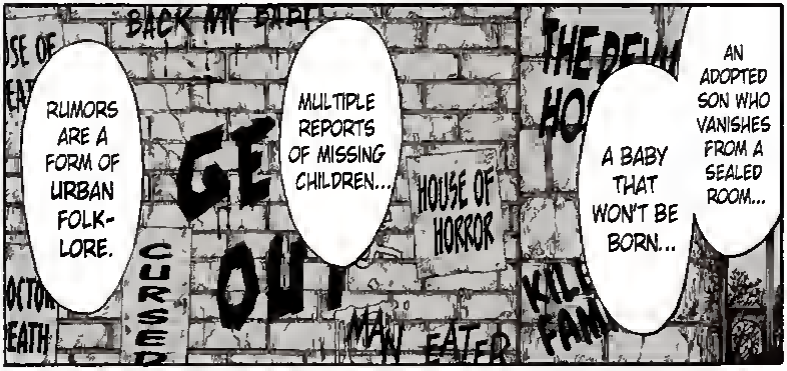

MY MOTHER TOOK THE BABY AWAY FROM ME,
BUT THE STRESS OF THE INCIDENT KILLED HIS MOTHER.
MY MOTHER HID THE CHILD SO NO ONE WOULD KNOW WHAT HAPPENED...
BUT THEN HIS FATHER KILLED HIMSELF IN GRIEF...


THE KUONJI FAMILY SHOULD HAVE LEFT THOSE OLD SUPERSTITIONS BEHIND WHEN THEY MOVED TO TOKYO.
YOUR FAMILY NAME, YOUR BLOODLINE, YOUR CURSE...
YOU CAN'T FREE YOURSELVES WITHOUT ABANDONING THESE THINGS.


BUT INSTEAD ...
YOU CLUNG TO YOUR OLD WAYS, AND ADDED A THIRD TRAGEDY TO YOUR TORTURED FAMILY HISTORY.


AND THAT CAUSED ANOTHER TRAGEDY...
INDEED.


YOU MEAN TAB-LOIDS?
YES.
NAUGHTY NIGHTS
HORNY HOUSEWIVES!
THE FRIAS COME OFF
URBAN LEGENDS ARE SHORT-LIVED, BUT THEY SPREAD QUICKLY.
LOCAL LEGENDS CAN PERSIST IN THE ORAL HISTORY OF A VILLAGE FOR A VERY LONG TIME.


RUMORS ARE A FORM OF URBAN FOLK-LORE.
MULTIPLE REPORTS OF MISSING CHILDREN...
A BABY THAT WON'T BE BORN...
AN ADOPTED SON WHO VANISHES FROM A SEALED ROOM...
GET OUT
HOUSE OF HORROR
MAN EATER

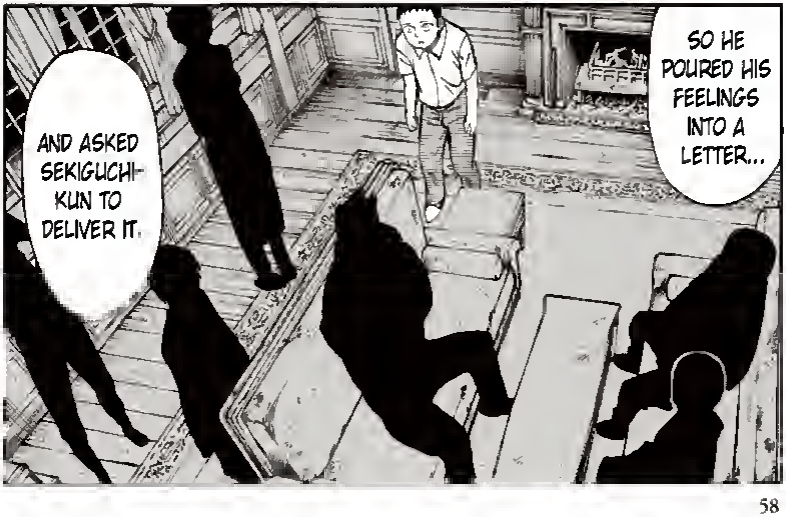
AND THE STAR OF THESE NEW LEGENDS WAS...

RYOUKO-SAN.

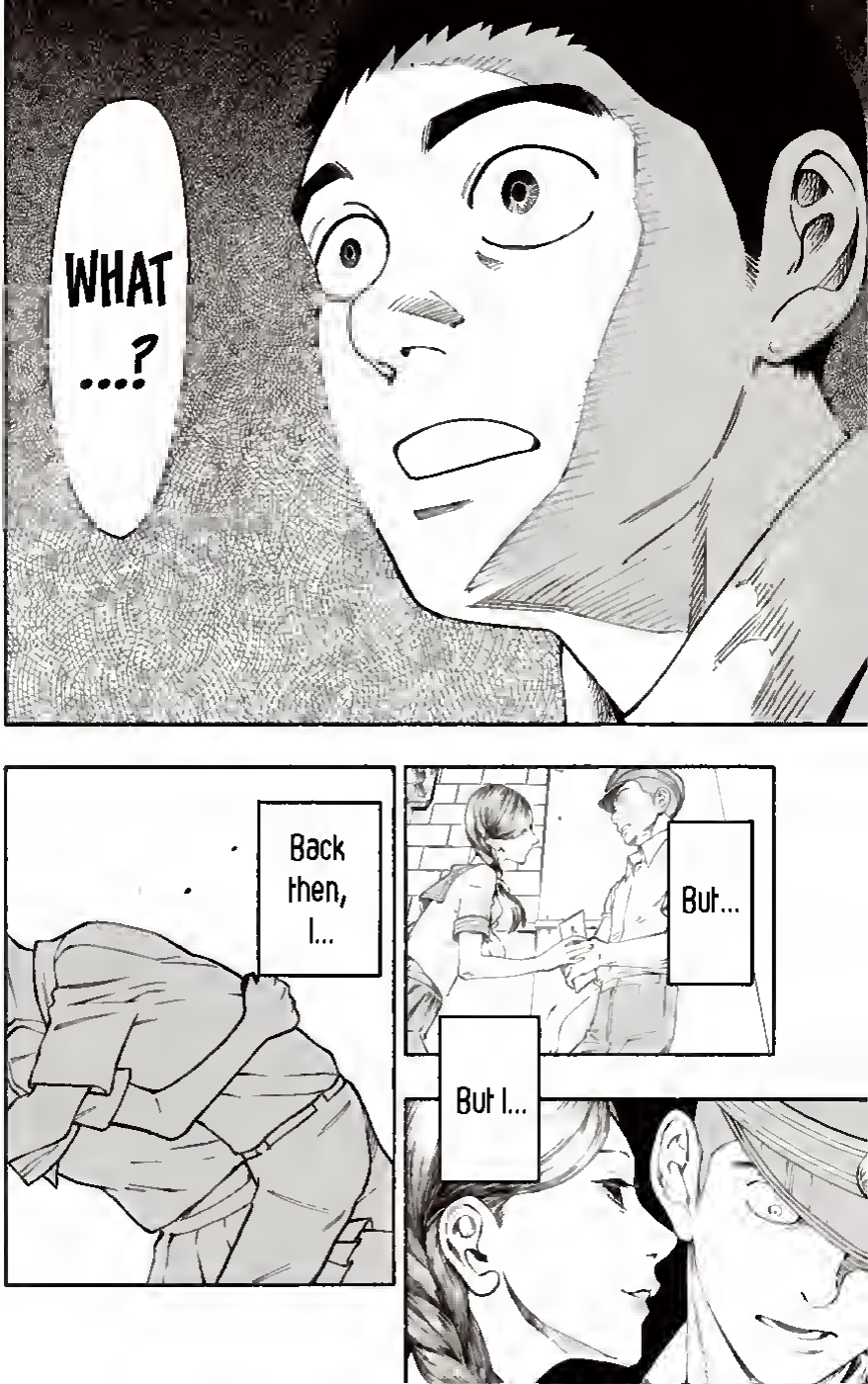
But...
Ryouko-san...?
THE "HEROINE" OF OUR STORY WAS ALWAYS RYOUKO-SAN.
I'M AFRAID THAT KYOUKO IS MERELY A SUPPORTING CHARACTER IN THIS TRAGIC TALE.
WAIT, DON'T YOU MEAN KYOUKO?
.....
ISN'T THAT RIGHT, MR. AND MRS. KUONJI?

IT ALL BEGAN WITH A LOVE LETTER.
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

12 YEARS AGO A VERY SHY AND SERIOUS STUDENT NAMED FUJINO MAKIO FELL IN LOVE FOR THE FIRST TIME.
THE OBJECT OF HIS AFFECTIONS WAS A 15-YEAR-OLD KUONJI KYOUKO.


SO HE POURED HIS FEELINGS INTO A LETTER...
AND ASKED SEKIGUCHI-KUN TO DELIVER IT.

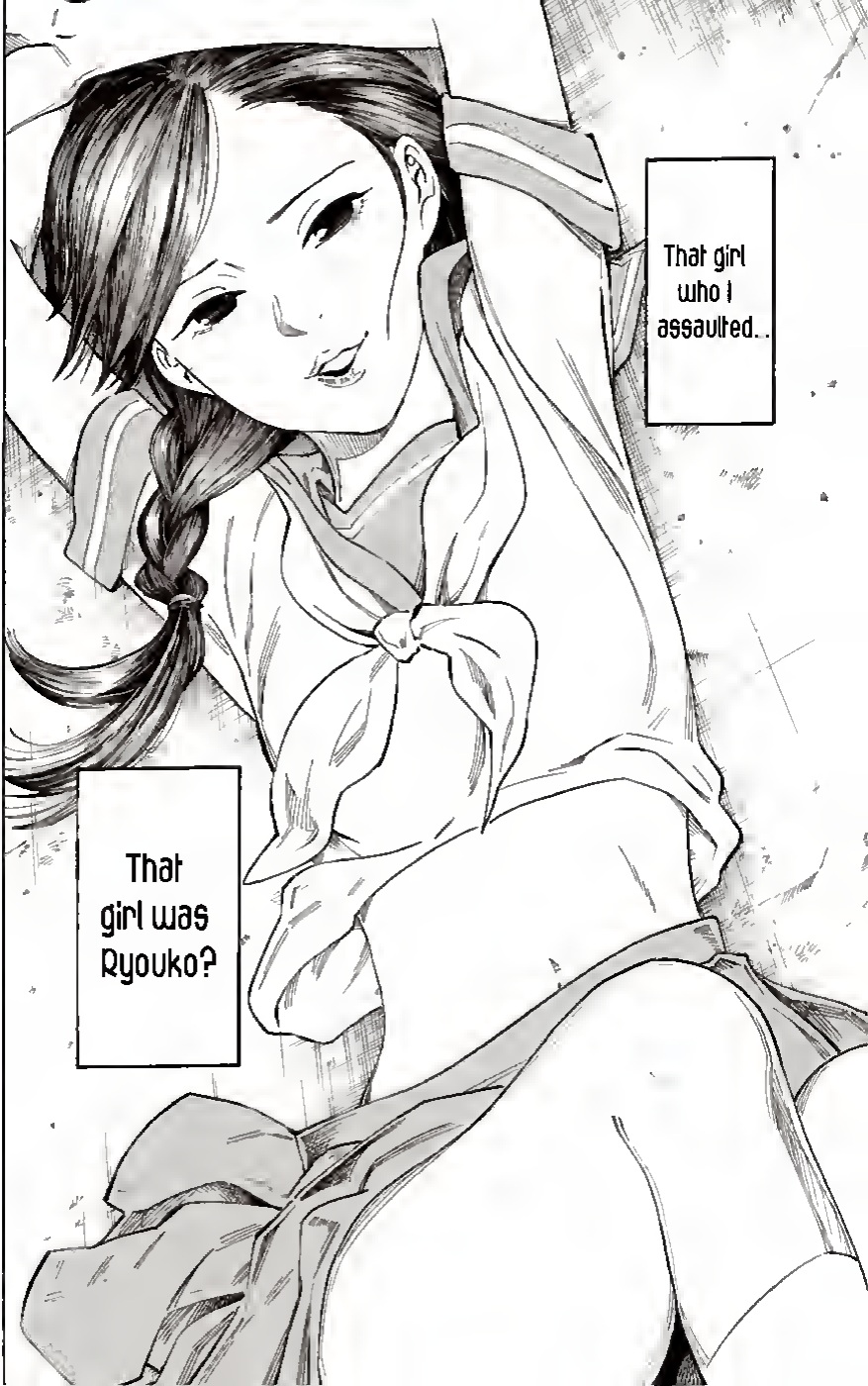
WAIT A MINUTE, KYOUGOKU-DOU!
IN-DEED.
THE LETTER WAS NEVER DELIVERED TO KYOUKO-SAN.
BUT KYOUKO SAID THAT SHE NEVER GOT A LETTER!
IS THAT WHERE THIS MESS STARTED?
I... I DELI-VERED IT!
I KNOW I DID...
OH, YOU DELI-VERED IT.
BUT YOU DELIVERED IT TO THE WRONG GIRL.


WHAT ...?
Back then, I...
But...
But I...

That girl...
She was...
THAT CAN'T BE TRUE!
I SHOWED HER THE LETTER!
ARE YOU SAYING THAT RYOUKO-SAN LIED AND PRETENDED TO BE HER SISTER!?
BUT THAT'S...
I DON'T THINK IT WAS A LIE.
OR AT LEAST, IT WASN'T ONE AT FIRST.
MY GUESS IS THAT THE NAME ON THE LETTER WAS MIS-SPELLED.

NOTE
Kyouko's name is spelled "梗子", but "京子" is a far more common spelling.
IT SAYS "KUONJI KYOUKO..." BUT THE SPELLING IS WRONG!!
IT SHOULD BE "梗子!!"
久遠寺京子
THIS IS THE "TERRIBLE MISTAKE" THAT FUJIMAKI SPOKE OF IN HIS DIARY.
HE MISSPELLED HER NAME AS "京子" WHICH LOOKS VERY SIMILAR TO "涼子" (RYOUKO).
久
I DON'T BELIEVE IT!!
ALL THIS BECAUSE HE USED THE WRONG KANJI FOR "KYOUKO!?"
I SUSPECTED THAT YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE ME, SO I DID SOME RESEARCH.
DIRECTOR, THE OTHER DAY YOU SAID THAT YOU TOOK A FAMILY VACATION NEAR THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR, RIGHT?
YES, BUT...

SEKIGUCHI-KUN, YOU CAME HERE TO DELIVER THE LETTER ON SEPTEMBER 16TH, 1940.
THAT WAS THE WHEN THE KUONJIS WERE ON VACATION...
BUT RYOUKO-SAN WAS ILL AND STAYED HOME.
I CHECKED THE RECORDS OF HOTELS IN HAKONE, AND THEY CONFIRM IT.
Kuonji Family: 3 Guests
Yoshioka, Kikuno, Kyouko
THE ONLY PEOPLE AT THE HOSPITAL THAT DAY...
WERE TOKIZOU-SAN, HIS WIFE, AND RYOUKO-SAN.
SHOCK!


That girl who I assaulted...
That girl was Ryouko?

That's right...
Some part of me recognized her...
Some part of me still remembered what I did...
I...
Some part of me still remembered Kuonji Ryouko...
I...

No...
WAIT A MINUTE!
ARE YOU SAYING THAT THE GIRL WHO GOT THE LETTER, SECRETLY HAD AN AFFAIR WITH FUJINO MAKIO, AND HAD HIS BABY...
WAS RYOUKO!?
IT WAS RYOUKO-SAN.